FEBRUARY
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Adventure

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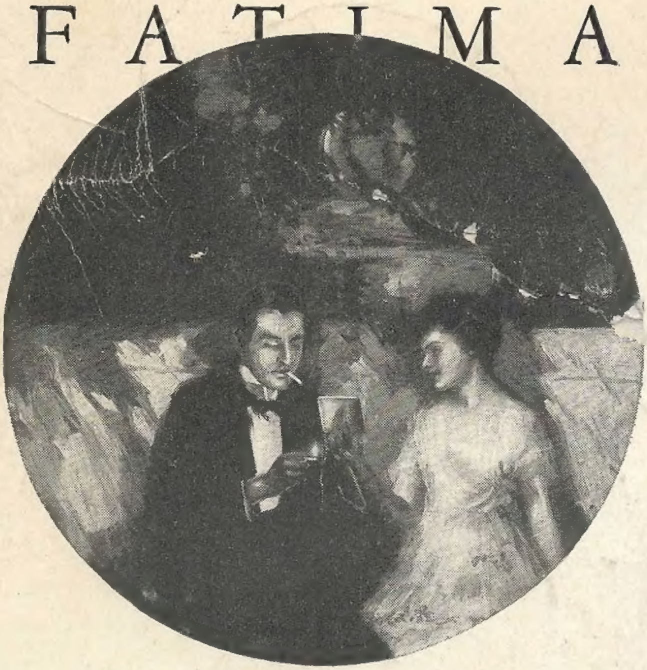

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Volume 57
Number 3

Chief Engineer Dunlap

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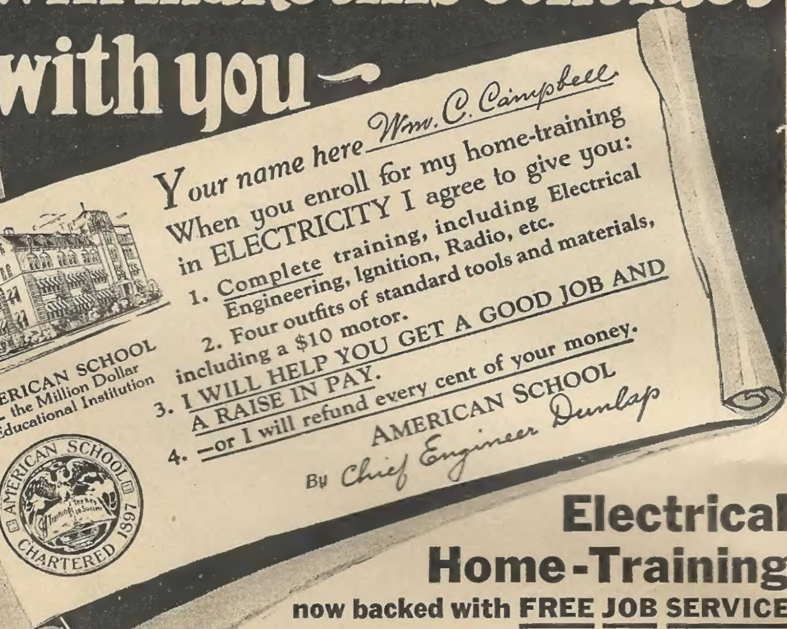

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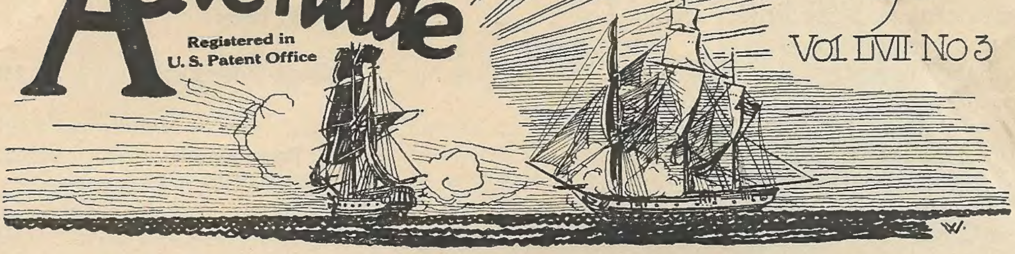

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Three Complete Novelettes

AS THE moon waned over the jungles of the upper Orinoco, an ancient medicine-man brewed snake-skins while *Loco Léon* looked on—thinking of the black man who had once been white. "GRAY," a complete novelette, by Arthur O. Friel, will appear in the next issue.

HOW they hated him! And how he liked himself! Until he began to hate himself. Then they admitted that he wasn't such a bad fellow. "TOLLEY TELLS HIMSELF" is a complete novelette of the Aviation Service, by Thomson Burtis, in the next issue.

"AND that," said *Constable Prawl*, as he put his foot in the stirrup, "is what I call a mighty close shave." "THE CONSTABLE OF COYOTE CREEK," a complete novelette, by William Byron Mowery, will appear in the next issue.

Who was the Man in the Iron Mask?

THIS mysterious prisoner on the ramparts of an island prison has always excited the most intense interest. What was the life which he exchanged for one silent as the grave? What had he done? Who was he? What was his past? The dissolute life of a courtier? Or the devious ways of an intriguing diplomat? Had some fair one in the hallowed circle of royalty loved not wisely but too well? Why during all these years has he remained the greatest of all mysteries?

NONE DARED TELL SECRET

Some believe that he was a twin or even elder brother of Louis XIV, a true heir to the crown hidden from the time of his birth. Others think that he was the eldest illegitimate son of Charles II; or that he, and not Louis XIII, was the actual father of Louis XIV. Some have thought that he was the son of Buckingham and the Queen of France; others, that he was the son of Louis XIV and De la Vallière. To have revealed it would have cost anyone his life. The regent admitted when drunk that the prisoner was a son of Anne of Austria and Mazarin. Louis XV refused to tell Madame de Pompadour. Madame Campan stated that Louis XVI did not know the secret. De Chamillart on his deathbed declined to reveal the secret.

MASKED—HIS FACE HIS SECRET

In 1669 there was hurried across France a masked man whose identity was shrouded in mystery. Never has a prisoner been guarded with such vigilance and with such fear of his story becoming known. He was taken to an island prison where the governor carried his food to him; a confessor saw him once a year; but no other visitor ever laid eyes on him. *He was always masked—his face alone would tell his secret.*

He was well treated; supplied with fine clothing, books, and served from silver dishes. The governor stood before him uncovered, and addressed him as *Mon prince*. When the prisoner wrote messages on his white linen he was supplied only with black.

He is not a myth, as is proven by letters between Louvois, the minister, and Saint-Mars, the governor of the prison. These are all written in veiled language; never once is he given a name. No letter mentions his crime or whether he had committed one.

SECRET EVEN AFTER DEATH

This horrible punishment ended when, in 1703, the most mysterious of all prisoners died and was buried in the dead of night, under a false name, and given a false age.

His cell was carefully painted so that any message he might have written would be covered up, and everything he used was destroyed lest any clew might be left. Thus vanished a man whose name and identity was unknown even to his gaoler—some think even to the prisoner himself.

WHY WAS HIS LIFE PRESERVED?

What was the reason for all this secrecy? What crime, if any, did this man, evidently of exalted rank, commit that he should be buried alive for life? Why did the king preserve the life of this prisoner? Why did he not have him put to death? The subject becomes more mysterious as we investigate.

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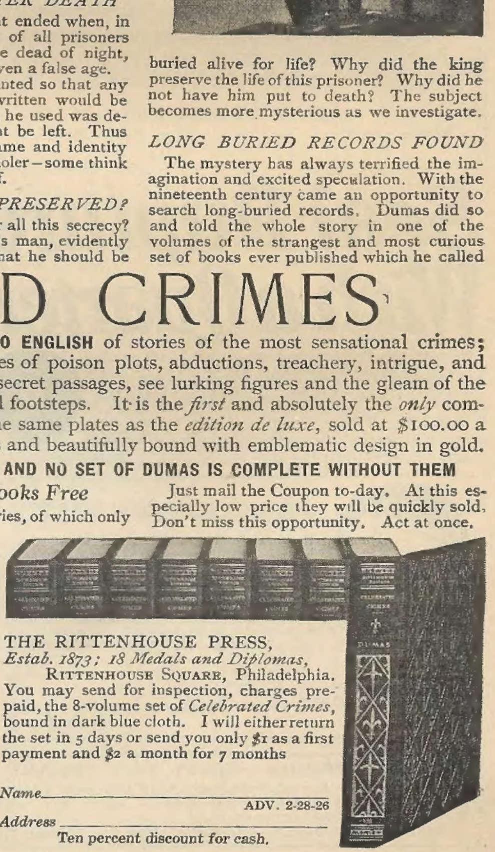

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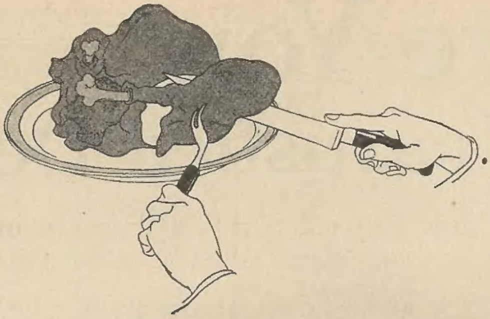

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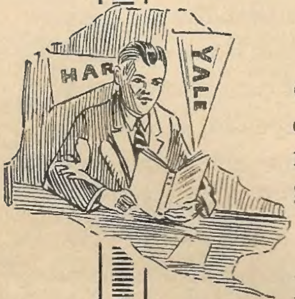

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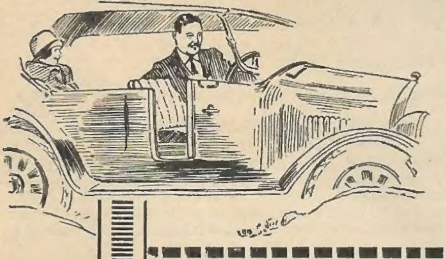

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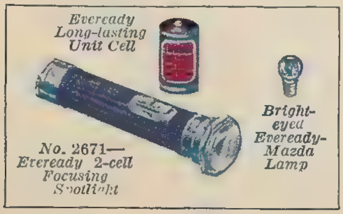
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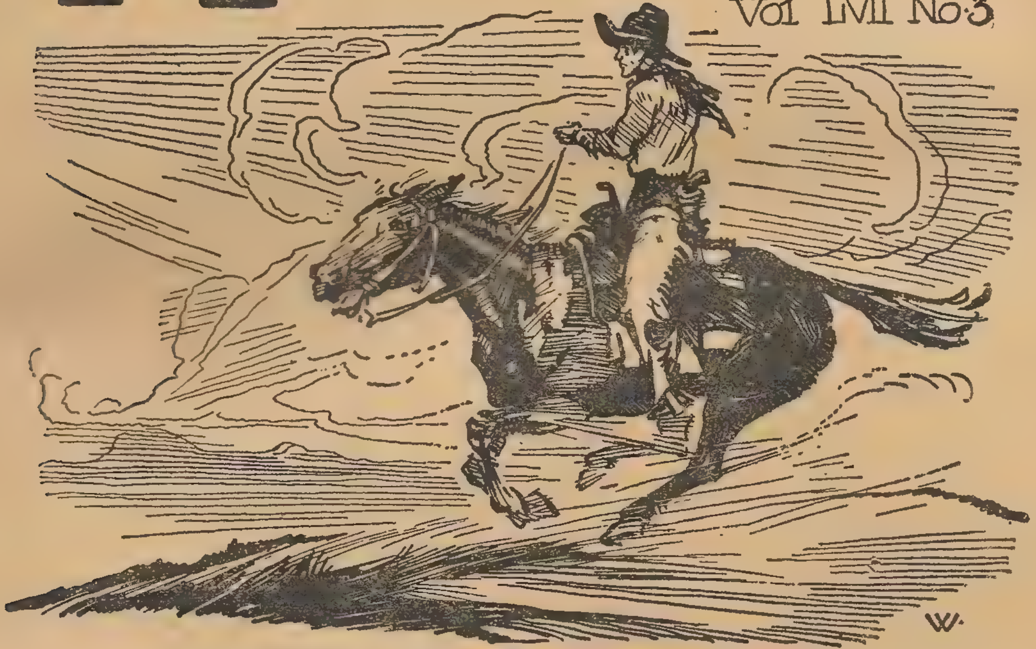

THE SWAMPER

A Complete Novelette

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Hidden Blood," "The Lovable Liar," etc.

THE light was dim in the old one-room cabin. There was an odor of wood ashes, strong tobacco, the reek of kerosene from the old lamp, almost dry now. On the bunk, humped beneath a tumble of nondescript bedding, was an old man, his white, unkempt beard almost hiding his pain-wracked features, his bony hands clawing at the covering.

Beside the bunk, humped on a rough stool, sat a thin-faced oldish man, gaunt of frame. His gray hair was close cropped, his face heavily seamed, as though sharing the suffering of the man on the bunk.

"I'd never 'a' knowed yuh, Jim," said the man on the bunk painfully. "You ain't the same man. My ——, you was big in them days; big and husky with black ha'r. It's a long time ago, Jim—a long time ago. Even yore voice ain't familiar, but I'm takin' yore word that yo're Jim Sylvester."

"I'm Jim Sylvester all right, 'Paw-Paw' Jones," the man spoke softly, barely moving his thin lips. "For twenty years I've been Jim Smith, number 1723. I'm still Jim Smith."

"Jim Smith, eh? Yuh didn't give the right name?"

"Why should I? Names don't mean anythin' to them. Yuh get a number, thassall. I stayed the full twenty years. I was thirty-eight when I went in—I'm a hundred now."

"And I'm dyin'," said the man on the bunk wearily. "I never done much good in

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life, Jim. Just poked from place to place, allus expectin' to make a stake. This is a good prospect I've got now," Paw-Paw Jones' eyes lighted with the enthusiasm of a chronic prospector. "She's widenin' with every shot. My last assay showed about fifty dollars a ton, free millin'.

"It was my stake, Jim. It's worth a million, I tell yuh. But," and the light died from his eyes, "I—I made a mistake when I thought all four shots went off. Only three went, Jim; and I drove my pick into the other one."

"That was hard luck," nodded Sylvester. "I'm sorry, Paw-Paw."

"Oh, I reckon it's all right, Jim. ——, a man's got to die some time. But—I just struck it." In old Paw-Paw Jones' voice was a slight complaint against the fate which was to rob him of his one chance for a stake.

"It's funny," he continued, "that we never heard about you bein' sent to the pen. You jist faded out, Jim. Nobody knew where yuh went. Yuh say yuh killed a man in Denver—a man yuh never seen before?"

Sylvester nodded, his lips set in a grim smile.

"Yeah, I did. He raised up in bed and I shot him three times. I s'pose I'd have shot him with every bullet in my gun, except for two men who were comin' down the hall. They grabbed me."

"But why did yuh do it, Jim?"

"Mistake."

"You thought it was Bart McLeod?"

Sylvester nodded.

"I took my medicine, told 'em I was Jim Smith, and paid for my mistake. Afterwards I found out that Bart had given up the room a few hours before, and it had been rented to the man I killed."

"You wasn't givin' Bart an even break, Jim."

"Even break!" Sylvester laughed bitterly. "Did he give me an even break, when he stole my wife? Would you give a rattlesnake an even break, Paw-Paw? I whipped him in a fair fight, and when I was snowed in down in the Lost Creek Cañons, where I —— near died of starvation, after I was white enough to put his name on my location notice to the richest prospect I ever seen, he stole my wife."

"What was the name of that mine yuh located, Jim?"

"I called it the Nellie Lode."

"Nellie Lode?"

"After my wife," said Sylvester softly. "I recorded it for me and Bart McLeod—and then I found out he had taken my wife away with him."

The dying man nodded slowly.

"It was a rich one, Jim. Bart McLeod sold out for a quarter of a million a few years ago. It seems to me that I heard about you and Bart havin' a big fight in Silver Hill."

"An hour by the clock," said Sylvester slowly. "We fought in a saloon, stripped to the waist—me and the man I had loved better than a brother. And I whipped him, Paw-Paw. We was both cut to ribbons. I knocked him out, but I didn't know it. They stopped the fight and led me away.

"We'd been pardners for three years—me and Bart. When I got married he said the pardnership still stood. I thought he was shootin' square, Paw-Paw. I'd 'a' staked my soul that Bart was square. There was a baby—comin'," Sylvester's voice broke and he got to his feet, pacing the length of the old cabin, while the rough, puncheon floor rattled beneath his feet. The dying man's eyes closed wearily, as he waited for Sylvester to continue.

"I caught Bart McLeod givin' her twenty dollars in gold," Sylvester stopped pacing and leaned against the bunk. "Money was scarce in them days, Paw-Paw. I knocked Bart down, flung the money through the window, and went back to the saloon.

"And when Bart came down there we had our fight. I didn't go back home. They patched me up. I heard of a strike in the Lost Creek country—a placer strike. I took what stuff I could carry on my back and headed for that country.

"I was a crazy fool, Paw-Paw. It was too late in the season. But I found the Nellie Lode—and then the blizzard struck. I reckon I lost all track of time, and I was almost dead when I got back. A handful of beans lasted me over a week—the last weak. I recorded my claim, givin' Bart half-interest—because we were still pardners. And then I found my home empty, and I heard that my wife and Bart McLeod had headed for Denver."

"I dunno," said Paw-Paw Jones dully. "It seems like I heard somethin' about it. It was a long time ago, and I ain't very clear in my head. I know that Bart McLeod bought a lot of property in Smoky

River Valley, and he's a big cattleman. You ort to make him give up that money he got for the Nellie Lode. And I think yuh will, Jim—if the pen didn't break yore nerve."

"I dunno," Sylvester spoke softly. "I burned myself out, hatin' Bart McLeod. Twenty years of hate, Paw-Paw. Yuh ought to be glad yo're goin' out like yuh are—hatin' nobody."

For a long time there was silence. The almost empty old kerosene lamp gluttered in a draught from a patched window. Old Paw-Paw Jones' face was ashen against the dirty pillow. The mis-fired charge of dynamite had torn the old man so badly that he hardly felt the pain. The doctor had told Paw-Paw the worst, and had left him to the company of Jim Sylvester, alias Jim Smith, who had begged the doctor to let him have a talk with the old man before he died.

They had known each other twenty years ago, and Sylvester and hoped that Paw-Paw Jones might know more of the story. The old man moved his head, but did not open his eyes.

"Jim, are yuh still there?" he whispered.

"I'm here, Paw-Paw."

"I almost forgot, Jim," Paw-Paw's voice was a panting whisper now, "I almost forgot her. Nellie. That's her name, Jim. She's in the Gem at Meteor. She's an orphan. Find her, Jim, and—don't go away! Jim—" His voice dropped to a meaningless mumble.

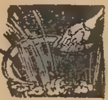
"Keep goin', Paw-Paw," urged Sylvester. "Who is she? Who is Nellie? Paw-Paw, can't yuh hear me askin' yuh?"

"—right thing by her, Jim," mumbled Paw-Paw. He sat up in bed, his wide eyes wide with wonder, staring toward the front of the room.

"Didja hear it?" he panted. "I told him them timbers was too weak. The tunnel has fell in with us!" He breathed heavily, clawing at the old blankets. "Air's bad already. Look!"

He pointed at the guttering lamp. "When the candle won't burn, yo're gone."

"Take it easy, Paw-Paw," breathed Sylvester, as he reached for the lamp. But the lamp flickered out as his hand touched it, and he heard Paw-Paw Jones sigh heavily. Quickly he turned from the table and scratched a match. Paw-Paw Jones had slumped forward, his hands clutching the blanket—dead.



JIM SYLVESTER turned and walked to the door, where he leaned heavily. He could see the flickering lights of Oro Madre, the little mining settlement on a flat below. The breeze was redolent of the pines, and the atmosphere so clear that he could hear some one playing a jig-tune on a fiddle, far away in one of the cabins, and hear every beat of the man's foot on the floor.

"What was he tryin' to tell me?" wondered Sylvester. "It was about a honkatonk girl whose name was Nellie—an orphan. He wanted me to do the right thing by her. My ——! Her name was Nellie—an orphan. My wife's name."

Some one was coming up the trail now. Sylvester stepped outside and waited for the man to come. It was the doctor.

"He died about five minutes ago," said Sylvester.

"Yes?" The doctor sighed softly. "Quite a climb up here. He didn't suffer much, did he?"

"No, not much."

The doctor went inside, and Sylvester waited for him. They walked down the hill together.

"Jones had struck a rich vein," said the doctor. "Did he mention any relative—any one he wanted to leave the money—the mine, I mean—to, Mr. Smith?"

For several moments Sylvester did not answer. Then:

"It may sound kinda queer to you, Doc. Paw-Paw didn't write out no orders, but he asked me to see that his mine went to a dance-hall girl in Meteor. Her name is Nellie."

"I see," the doctor spoke softly. "Well, somebody might as well profit—and why not this girl? I'll tell the judge what Jones said."

"I'm goin' to Meteor," said Sylvester. "I dunno how long it'll be before I get there, but I'll look for this girl, and if I can find her, I'll send her up here."

"Well, that might be all right," admitted the doctor. "If you are going to Meteor, suppose I write you, after talking it over with our local lawyer."

"That's all right, Doctor. Might be a good scheme."

"What name?"

"Jim Smith."

The doctor noted the name on the back of an envelope.

"And the number?" he asked.

"Seventeen, twenty—" Sylvester swallowed heavily. "Just send it to the post-office and I'll get it, Doc."

"All right. Thanks, Smith."

Sylvester walked over to a log saloon and bought a drink. The room was hazy with smoke. A battered old music box tinkled out a once popular march; poker-chips rattled; a half-drunk miner hammered on the bar, beating time to his own song.

Two bearded miners came in and leaned on the bar, calling in loud tones for their liquor.

"Paw-Paw Jones is dead," one of them informed the bartender. "Died a little while ago. Just saw the doctor."

"Dead, eh?" The bartender showed little emotion. "I heard he got all blowed to —— this mornin'. He just struck it rich, too, didn't he?"

The men drank gustily, wiping their mouths with their hands.

"He shore did," said one of them. "I wish I owned that mine. It's worth a lot of money—mebby a million."

"Aw-w-w—!" exploded the bartender. "Million!"

"What do you know about it?"

"Million is a lot of money. Why the Nellie Lode only sold for a quarter of a million."

"That ain't nothin' to go by. Paw-Paw Jones' mine is worth that much, jist figurin' what's in sight, and he ain't hardly scratched the ground yet."

Sylvester left the bar and walked back to the door. Across the street was the stage-station, and the night stage was just drawing up to load for the trip down the valley. He crossed the street and talked with the driver, while some men were loading, and found that the stage would take him to the railroad at Colton, from which a half-day trip would take him to Meteor, in Smoky River Valley.

He climbed inside the stage and settled back on a cushioned seat, drawing his hat over his eyes. He had enough money to pay his fare to the railroad, which was sufficient for the present.

A man was talking with the driver near the door of the old stage; a man whose bulk almost screened the stage from the yellow lights of the stage-office.

"I got here just in time," the big man said huskily. "Time's worth money to me. Wasted almost a week up here, as it is."

"You came in a week ago tomorrow," said the driver. "I was wonderin' if you made the deal you spoke about."

"I did not." The big man laughed harshly. "Offer a prospector ten thousand dollars for an unproven prospect, and he thinks you're tryin' to beat him out of a million."

The driver laughed and agreed that prospectors were all alike.

"Old Paw-Paw Jones died tonight," offered the driver. "Got all busted up in a blast, just after he made a big strike. That's fate for yuh. But he prob'ly died satisfied, just to have made a strike. They're all alike. Well, I reckon we're due to hit the ruts for Colton."

The big man grunted and climbed into the stage, settling into a seat beside Jim Smith, swaying the stage with his huge body, breathing heavily from the effort. The driver slammed the door and climbed up over the wheel.

The team lurched into a trot, rattling the stage over the rocky street, grinding down through a rocky wash. It was so dark in the stage that Jim Smith could not see his companion, but he could hear him grunt audibly when the wheels hit a particular deep chuck-hole.

The road led straight down a wooded valley, where the going was more smooth, and Jim Smith settled down to sleep. He dozed fitfully for several hours. The big man snored stentoriously, swore savagely when awakened by a sharp lurch, and sometimes rolled heavily against the lighter passenger, when the vehicle side-swayed around a curve.

It was moonlight now. Jim Smith stretched, yawned widely and looked at his companion. The moonlight was full in his face, bringing our every feature. Jim Smith's body tensed. In spite of the fact that years had added much flesh, the companion was the man Jim Smith had hated for twenty long years—Bart McLeod.

The ex-convict turned away and looked out of the other window, wondering if it was only a dream. He turned back and studied the sleeping man. No, he decided, there was no possible chance of being mistaken. It was Bart McLeod, even to the white scar over his right eye, where Jim Sylvester's knuckles had almost ripped an eyebrow off twenty years ago.

The sleeping man grunted and changed position, blinking his eyes sleepily at the moon. Jim Smith drew his hat down closer over his eyes and leaned back. The big man glanced quickly at him, cleared his throat raspingly, and sat up straight.

"—— such a road-bed!" he growled. "Can you sleep? I can't."

He leaned closer to the window. They were climbing a grade, and the hills cut off the moonlight.

"This must be Carson's grade," said McLeod. Well, thank ——, it's only twelve miles more. You been workin' in the mines?"

"No," said Smith huskily. "Prospectin'."

"Prospectin', eh? Hm-m-m-m. I used to prospect. Buy 'em now. Cheaper." He laughed harshly. "Let the other feller find 'em."

"Have you been out buyin'?" asked Smith.

"——, no! Tryin' to buy. Lot of good property back there. That is, it looks good. No man knows what's just ahead. I was willin' to gamble. Had an engineer in here a few weeks ago, and he reported well on several prospects. I come in and offer hard cash, but they want more. No fool like a prospector."

"I reckon that's right," said Smith softly. "They all point to the price of the Nellie Lode."

McLeod laughed. "That's true. But that's a mine—proven. These are all prospects. Know anythin' about the Nellie?"

"No," lied Smith.

"Good property. I'm McLeod, the man who sold it." He said it simply. "Might have got more for it, but I'm no hog. Quarter of a million is enough."

"It ought to be," said Smith softly. The stage lurched to a stop, and they heard a voice, muffled by the closed stage:

"Don't be a —— fool. Keep yore hands where they are."

"A holdup!" exclaimed McLeod. "—— the luck! Have you got a gun?"

"No," Smith shook his head.

"Neither have I. Swore I'd never travel without one, too."

A shadowy figure moved in close to the door.

"Open the door and come out," he ordered. "No foolin', gents. This is a business deal; so step lively."

THE holdup man was on McLeod's side of the stage, but it was evident he could not see how many passengers were aboard. Grunting a curse, McLeod swung around in his seat, facing the door, and Smith saw him take something quickly from his pocket and shove it beneath the cushion.

"Speed up a little," warned the man outside. He jerked the door open, covering the opening with a shotgun. "No foolin' now. If you've got a gun, yuh better—"

He ceased speaking when the huge bulk of McLeod filled the doorway. Acting quickly, Smith shoved in behind him, his exploring fingers searching beneath the cushion. He found it—a huge bill-fold, stuffed like a cushion. Swiftly he shoved it inside the waistband of his trousers, where it slid down to the top of his right boot, sagging in behind his knee.

He stepped out beside McLeod, while the menacing shotgun covered them both. He could see the driver, silhouetted against the sky, looking not unlike a poorly drawn letter Y. Another armed man stood just beside the heads of the wheel team, covering the driver, and a moment later another man came around the rear of the stage and joined the one with Smith and McLeod.

None of the bandits spoke, until after they had made a search of both passengers, and had ransacked the interior of the stage. One of them swore viciously, as he climbed up behind the driver and threw down the treasure box. It did not take him long to smash the lock and remove the contents.

"Git back inside," ordered the man with the shotgun to the passengers. They obeyed with alacrity, and the driver was warned to look straight ahead and take his time.

The stage lurched ahead, while McLeod made a short search beneath the cushion, swearing bitterly.

"Did they get somethin' from you?" asked Smith innocently.

"—— 'em—yes!" roared McLeod. "I'll have every sheriff in the state on their heels. By ——, they got twenty thousand dollars of my money. Like a fool, I took cash with me to buy out some prospects."

"It's shore tough," said Smith. "But if yo're the man who sold the Nellie Lode, yuh can stand to lose that much."

McLeod snorted disgustedly and settled back in his seat, while the driver sent the four horses in a run down the slope of the grade, heading for Colton to report the robbery. Jim Smith relaxed luxuriously, a grim smile on his lips. He was beginning to get even with the man he hated worse than anybody in the world. It would take money to fight McLeod—and that uncomfortable bulge under his knee was worth twenty thousand.

"Got any idea who them fellers might be?" questioned Smith.

"—— lot of sheepherders!" rasped McLeod, his usually husky voice shrill with anger. "They can't buy me out and they can't put sheep into Smoky River Valley, unless they do; so they steal my cattle, steal my money—tryin' to run me out. By —— I'll fix that outfit!"

Smith smiled to himself. It was worth much to feel that Bart McLeod was suffering—that his ill-gotten wealth was not bringing him peace of mind.

"Do you suppose they knew you had that money, McLeod?"

"Knew it? Of course they knew it? But what business is it of yours? Who in —— are you?"

"Smith is my name."

McLeod laughed harshly.

"All right. I dunno what we'd do in this country, if it wasn't for the name of Smith."

But Smith did not take offense.

"If yuh know it's all bein' done by sheepmen, why don't yuh stop 'em? What have they got against you?"

"They want Smoky River Valley. This is sheep country. Colton is a headquarters for sheep-men. Old Vint Brawley is the head of the outfit. He's out to break me—drive me out of the Smoky River country. They've got to have range, but they can't get into Smoky, thank ——! As long as I own Gateway ranch they can want and be —— to 'em. They can't come in from the South, East nor West—unless their —— woolies grow wings."

The stage rattled into the little town of Colton and drew up at the stage-office. It was well past midnight, but the two saloons of the town were evidently doing a good business. At a swift explanation from the driver, the agent hurried down to the sheriff's office with news of the robbery. Several men came over from one of the saloons and listened to the driver's tale of the holdup.

In a few minutes the sheriff arrived, half-dressed, important. He listened to McLeod's story, which was corroborated by the driver and Jim Smith. Smith kept well out of the light, making himself as inconspicuous as possible.

"And they got yore wallet with twenty thousand in it, eh?" queried the sheriff.

"They did!" snapped McLeod. "I shoved it under a seat-cushion and they found it."

The driver had no idea of how much was taken from the strong-box. By the time the sheriff had absorbed all the details of the robbery, quite a crowd had gathered.

"Nothin' to do until daylight, anyway," decided the sheriff. "No use huntin' around in the dark."

McLeod grunted and accepted his valise from the driver, who unpacked the things from the boot.

"Did they go through yore grip?" asked a bystander.

"I don't think so. I wish I'd had sense enough to put my money in it."

McLeod turned and walked up the street toward the Colton hotel, and Jim Smith crossed the street to a saloon, where he bought himself a drink. He was glad to be rid of Bart McLeod for a while, at least. There was always the possibility that McLeod might recognize him he thought, because he did not realize how much he had changed in twenty years.

He drank again, bought some cigars and went out. It had taken the last cent in his pocket, and he wanted to get a room, where he might take a look at his money—more money than he had ever expected to own.

He grinned to himself at how easy it had been to take that roll, and to shift the blame to the robbers. Those two drinks of liquor gave him a pleasant outlook on life. With twenty thousand dollars, he thought, he might do big things.

"A thousand dollars for every year I was breakin' rocks," he grinned to himself, as he reached the sidewalk and turned toward the hotel.

"Not big pay, but better than nothin'."

Two men were coming down the sidewalk toward him. It was too dark for him to see more than the black bulk of them, and to hear their boot heels rasping on the boards. He stepped aside to let them pass, but they suddenly crowded him to the wall, and something heavy thudded down on his head, bringing a shower of stars.

Some little time elapsed before he awoke, with a splitting headache, a knob on his head the size of an egg, and a flat taste in his mouth. Instinctively, as soon as he realized that he had been knocked down, he reached for the back of his right knee.

Only a foot-long rip in the cloth. The bulge had been removed. Jim Smith slid out to the edge of the sidewalk, spat disgustedly and rubbed his sore head.

Up in a hotel room, Bart McLeod undressed. His door was locked, and a chair back braced under the door-knob.

And he grinned as he removed a wide, soft-leather money-belt from around his expansive waist.

"Them sheep-men are sure goin' to be sore as —— when they find that wallet stuffed with strips of newspaper," he grinned to himself. "They must have taken me for an awful sucker. No wonder they think they can run me out of Smoky River Valley."

McLeod took a six-shooter from his valise, placed it under his pillow, and sat down on the edge of the bed to finish his cigar.

"I wonder where Smith fits into this?" he mused.

VINT BRAWLEY, leader of the sheep interests, was a man without a conscience. He was tall, gaunt, as gray as a badger, with a huge hooked nose, crooked yellow teeth. He wore his hair long, bcause some one had told him he looked like a prophet.

He had surrounded himself with men almost as unprincipled as himself—but not quite. Vint Brawley was in a class by himself. He lived alone, except for a pair of ugly sheep-dogs, which challenged every one who came in speaking distance of the shack.

It was the morning after the robbery that the two dogs tore out of the yard, stopped just outside the gate and gave Jim Smith the feeling that he had stopped just in time. Jim Smith's clothes were still sprinkled with hay, attesting to the fact that he had slept in a stable.

He had stopped short, eying the dogs, when Vint Brawley came to the door, leaning lazily, as he considered the unkempt person, held at bay by the dogs.

"What in —— do you want?" Thus Vint Brawley's idea of a pleasant greeting.

"Call off yore —— dogs, and I might tell yuh," growled Jim Smith. His head still ached a little, and he had had no breakfast.

"Mike! Pete! C'mere, you bone-hunters!" The two dogs turned and came back to the doorway, paying no more attention to Jim Smith, who followed them, just a trifle uneasily.

"Will they bite?" asked Jim Smith.

"Kinda particular. What do yuh want?"

"I want to talk with yuh, Brawley. Don't remember me, do yuh?"

The sheep-man studied Smith closely, his eyes half-shut, brow wrinkled in deep thought. Finally he shook his head.

"No, I don't know yuh. What in —— is this—a guessin' contest?"

"I rode in from Oro Madre with McLeod last night."

Brawley's eyes hardened quickly.

"Yuh did eh? Well?"

"And he didn't know me either."

"No? What's the answer?"

Smith sniffed.

"Cookin' breakfast?"

"What if I am?"

"I'll eat with you. Otherwise I don't eat. Spent the last cent I owned to pay for two drinks and a couple of cigars last night. And I might be worth a breakfast to you, Brawley."

"Yeah?" Brawley kicked at one of the dogs, which tried to get into the house, and grinned crookedly. "C'mon in. I'm kinda particular who I cook for, but I can't tell about you, until I know more about yuh. I don't condemn anybody, until I know somethin' about 'em."

Smith followed Brawley into the house. It was a two-room affair, none too well kept. A pan of bacon sizzled softly on the stove, and Smith sniffed at the steam from a coffee-pot. He noticed that Brawley wore a holstered gun, even at that time in the morning, and that Brawley did not turn his back.

"Probably got a lot on his conscience," said Smith to himself.

Brawley broke some eggs into the bacon grease, tossed the shells to the floor and wiped his hands on his knees.

"You came up here to do some talkin', didn't yuh?" asked Brawley. "I'm a —— of a good listener."

"Yo're tryin' to put Bart McLeod out of business, ain't yuh, Brawley?"

"Am I?" Brawley smiled crookedly. "Where did yuh get that idea?"

"McLeod told me last night."

"Yea-a-ah?"

"Yeah."

"Want yore eggs turned over?"

"Straight up."

Brawley slid the eggs out on a tin pan, took some cold biscuits from the oven, and poured out the coffee. He sat down, facing the door and motioned Smith to be seated.

"McLeod told yuh, did he?" queried Brawley. He laughed, showing his bad teeth. "Was he tryin' to get yore help, stranger?"

Smith shook his head, busy with his eating. He had taken off his hat, and the red welt he had acquired the night before interested Brawley.

"Got belted over the head, eh?"

Smith nodded.

"Somebody made a mistake, I reckon."

Smith felt that Brawley knew all about him losing the big roll of money.

"Folks do make mistakes," insinuated Brawley, his voice tinged with anger. Smith wondered if Brawley hadn't received his share of the swag, but did not care to mention it.

"You said you'd be worth a breakfast to me," suggested the sheep-man. "I don't see it, stranger."

Smith shoved back his plate and began stirring his coffee.

"You hate McLeod," he said slowly. He leaned across the table and his eyes hardened as he said:

"Hate, ——! You don't know what hate is, Brawley. I hate Bart McLeod worse than you ever will."

But Vint Brawley was no incautious fool. He decided that this stranger was a very good actor; possibly sent by McLeod to find out where Brawley stood in the matter. So he grinned and shook his head.

"Sounds kinda convincin'," he admitted. "But go ahead and hate Bart McLeod. See if I care how much yuh hate him."

"You don't believe me, Brawley?"

Brawley shoved back from the table, shaking his head.

"Why should I believe you? Bart McLeod must think I'm a fool, don't he? You finish yore breakfast and get to —— out of here."

Smith shook his head.

"Yo're wrong, Brawley."

"The —— I am! Playin' me for a sucker, eh?"

Brawley laughed angrily. His hand jerked to his holster, and a fraction of a second later Jim Smith was looking at the muzzle of Brawley's big Colt.

"Get on yore feet!" snapped Brawley. "Hands on the table."

Swiftly he searched Smith, looking for a weapon, of which Smith had none. Brawley grunted softly and slid his gun back in the holster.

"You must be scared of Bart McLeod," sneered Smith.

"Not afraid of McLeod," Brawley shook his head. "But yuh never can tell what one of his hired men might do."

"You still think I'm hired by McLeod?"

Brawley laughed and began rolling a cigaret, keeping his eyes on Smith.

"I like to hear a good liar tell things. Go ahead and tell me why yuh hate Bart McLeod."

Smith leaned forward in his chair, striking the table-top with his clenched fist.

"Because I am Jim Sylvester—that's why I hate him."

"Jim Sylvester?" Brawley squinted thoughtfully. "That name sounds kinda familiar, but I can't place yuh."

"Twenty-odd years ago, I was Bart McLeod's pardner. It was me that discovered the Nellie Lode."

"Yea-a-a-ah, I remember Jim Sylvester. You say yo're Sylvester? ——, I remember Jim Sylvester. You ain't him. If I remember rightly, he was a big, black-haired—"

"Wait a minute," begged Sylvester. "Twenty years in the penitentiary, yuh must remember."

"In the pen, eh? What for?"

"For killin' the wrong man, Brawley. I thought he was Bart McLeod. They sent me up for twenty years."

"Yeah?" Brawley seemed puzzled. He remembered that Sylvester had disappeared. "And what went wrong between you and McLeod?"

"Didn't you know? He stole my wife. They ran away to Denver together, and I followed them. When they arrested me for murder I took the name of Jim Smith. I thought I might beat the case; so I didn't want anybody to know who I was. But the evidence was too strong. I swore it was a mistake; admittin' that I did the killin'; so they gave me twenty years."

Brawley nodded.

"I reckon you are Jim Sylvester. I'd never have recognized yuh, if yuh hadn't told me. You don't look like him, but when I get to thinkin' about him, and lookin' at you, I can see who yuh are. But why come to me, Sylvester—or do yuh still want to be Smith?"

"Smith. I came to you, because yo're fightin' McLeod. I'm broke, Brawley. I want to see McLeod pay for what he done to me."

"You say he stole yore wife?"

"He did, —— his soul. There was to have been a baby, Brawley. I almost died, locatin' the Nellie Lode; locatin' a fortune for my wife and for the kid that was comin'. I shot square. Before goin' into the Lost Creek cañons I whipped Bart McLeod; but we were still pardners, and I located half of the Nellie Lode for him."

"And he sold it for a fortune," said Brawley thoughtfully. Then a crafty expression came to his eyes. "You better keep yore identity away from McLeod. He'd have one of his gun-men put yuh out in a minute. I know McLeod pretty —— well, and he ain't goin' to give yuh nothin'. Don't tell another soul who yuh are, Jim. Keep away from McLeod—and keep yore mouth shut.

"Gil Brant owns the Gem saloon in Meteor, and he's interested in my business. I'll give yuh a note to him. I need men in Smoky Valley—men with guts," Brawley squinted at Sylvester's misfit clothes and grinned crookedly.

"Mebby Gil needs another swamper."

"Swamper?" Sylvester had no desire to scrub floors, clean cuspidors; the usual occupation of a frowsy bum.

"A swamper," said Brawley, "might be in a position to hear things and do things."

"That's what I'm goin' to Smoky River Valley for," declared Sylvester warmly. "Give me the note and money enough to ride to Meteor."

THE Bar S, known as the Gateway ranch, was the guardian of Smoky River Valley. Situated at the extreme north end of the valley, it fairly blocked the U-shaped gorge, out of which roared Smoky River, foaming its way southward over a solid rock bed, fifty feet below the level of the ranch-house.

On the opposite, the east side, of the gorge was the railroad, its road-bed carved from the broken cliffs, a hundred feet above the river level. For a mile north on this side the cliffs broke sheer from the railroad grade to the river.

On the west side, at the mouth of the gorge, was the Bar S ranch-house and buildings, covering a space of possibly three hundred feet in width across the slope. Due west of the ranch-house the hill sloped sharply upward to a cliff, possibly a hundred feet higher than the ranch-house level.

At the foot of this cliff was a little frame shack, half-hidden in the overhang of the cliff. A zigzag trail led from the ranch-house up to this little shack, and two strands of fine copper wire extended from the shack to the ranch-house, using jack-pines in lieu of posts.

North of the ranch buildings a barb-wire fence extended from the upper cliffs to the edge of the gorge, so heavily strung with wire that a lizard would find difficulty in getting through. And in the length of it there was no break—no gate of any kind.

It was not an ideal location for a cattle ranch, and the old Bar S had borne a bad reputation. Men had said that it had been built there for a reason. They hinted that many Smoky River cows had gone north, via the cañon, without the consent of their owners.

But when Bart McLeod invested heavily in Smoky River cattle, he could see the strategic value of the Bar S. No matter if its original owners had seen its value in getting cattle out of the valley, Bart McLeod could see its value in keeping sheep out.

Because it would easily be possible to bring sheep in on that side of the river from the Colton country, which was only twenty miles north. And it was the only possible place of entry, unless they came in from the south, which would force them to traverse cattle country most of the way.

The surrounding ranges were inaccessible. The little shack under the cliff was a lookout, covering the upper reaches of the gorge, and a little telephone, a novelty in Smoky River, connected the shack with the ranch-house.

Bart McLeod was taking every safeguard. He had purchased the Double O, Circle M, K8 and the Bar S, all located on the West side of the river. McLeod made no effort to conceal the fact that he was going to own Smoky River Valley, and when he tried to buy the JAL ranch, the only outfit on the east side of the valley, he found that it was not for sale.

Later on he discovered that Vint Brawley owned it—and Vint Brawley was the sheep king of Colton. McLeod went to Brawley and offered him more than the ranch was worth, but the sheep-man refused. He not only refused, but showed McLeod proof that he had leased fifty thousand acres of Government land for grazing purposes.

That lease meant—sheep. And some of the acreage was on the west side of the river. The JAL ranch was about eight miles southeast of the Gateway, and five miles east of Meteor City. A rough, quarter-circle, starting with the Gateway would touch the K8, about three and one-half miles northwest of Meteor City, the Circle M, four miles west, and ending at the Double O, six miles south.

The Double O ranch was within two miles of the railroad, where a siding and loading pens had been established, known as the Double O siding. The loading pens were little used. There were no towns between Colton and Meteor and except for a few flag-stations through the mountains, the trains made no stops. Twenty miles south of Meteor was the town of Marshall.

Meteor City was a cattle-town, no more, no less. The population would number less than a thousand, as there was no industry in the valley, except cattle raising; no inducement for any one to live in Meteor, except those engaged in the few commercial pursuits dependent upon the range folk.

Being the county seat gave it a certain prestige, as the county officials lived there; but beyond that, it was merely a false-fronted town, narrow dusty streets; heat scourged in the summer, snowbound in the winter. All business houses were on the main street, one-story affairs, looking larger than they were because of the false fronts.

The largest building in the city was the Gem Saloon and Gambling House—and the best patronized. There were other saloons, but they merely existed. The Gem held the trade, possibly through virtue of its honkatonk show and dance space, and because of the fact that swift action might be had by those who wished to woo the elusive Lady Luck.

There was no denying the fact that Gil Brant was handsome. As an actor he would have been a matinee idol, no doubt. Just over six feet tall, well proportioned, graceful, with a well-shaped head, wavy hair—a thoroughbred in looks. His features were well modeled, pleasant. Perhaps his eyes were just a trifle too green, too cold.

It was Gil Brant's business to see that the Gem made money, and it did. But there had never been a hint of crooked deal or wheel in the Gem. When Vint Brawley found that Bart McLeod had blocked him from bringing sheep to Smoky River, he secretly purchased the Gem, hired his own men, and planned for the future.

Every employe of the Gem was a potential gun-man. There was "Doc" Ellis, the little Black-Jack dealer; "Muddy" Poole, the tall, grinning, gray-mustached man behind the roulette wheel; Harry Davis, the fat man at the stud game—all gun-men. The men of the three-piece orchestra, the bartenders, swampers, were all for the interests of Vint Brawley.

Gil Brant had accepted the services of Jim Smith without question, after he had read the letter from Vint Brawley. Jim did not know what that letter contained—nor care. He had found Brant in a private room at the rear of the Gem, and after reading the letter, Brant sent out for some drinks.

"You start swampin' in the morning," said Brant, as he tore the letter into small bits and dropped them in a cuspidor. "It won't be a cinch job, Smith, but Brawley don't forget favors.

"He told me a little of your story, and I guess you've got plenty of cause to hate McLeod. But you'll have to go easy, old man. McLeod is a pretty strong man around here, and if he knew we were working for Vint Brawley, we might be in a bad fix."

"I've waited twenty years," said Smith slowly. "I reckon a few more won't hurt."

"Good. Brawley tells me that McLeod stole your wife."

Smith nodded.

"He did."

Brant lit a cigaret and leaned back in his chair, squinting at the ceilling thoughtfully.

"Twenty years ago, eh? McLeod is married and has a girl about that age."

"McLeod has?" Smith jerked forward on his chair.

"I don't know how old the girl is," said Brant. "She looks about twenty. But I don't think she's McLeod's daughter. Somebody said she was Mrs. McLeod's daughter."

"This is goin' to be good," said Smith hoarsely. He tried to laugh, but it was only a grimace. Brant looked him over coldly and shook his head.

"You go slow, Smith. If you want to get even with McLeod, scheme out some way to get Brawley's sheep into Smoky Valley. You can hurt his pocket-book more that you can his conscience."

"McLeod's got him pretty well blocked, eh?"

"Right now he has. But Brawley's paying lease on fifty thousand acres of land—and he don't throw money away."

Smith said nothing about Paw-Paw Jones' death. He wanted to see this dance-hall girl—the girl whose name was Nellie. He spent the rest of the day loafing around the saloon, watching the cowboys come and go. He saw Dan Gatton, foreman of the JAL, a big, florid-faced cowboy; Dummy Lee, a short, fat-faced cowboy, who had earned his cognomen from talking too much; Lee Morse, a gangling cowboy, with roan-colored hair and buck-teeth.

But the JAL was not merely a blind for the sheep interests. There were plenty of JAL stock on the east side of the Smoky, and the JAL outfit seemed to put in most of their time minding their own business. It is barely possible that they were wise enough to realize that odds were against them; so played safe by minding their own affairs.

IT WAS several days after the coming of Jim Smith. Out at the loading pens, a long train of cattle-cars were shunted back and forth, while dirty, perspiring cowboys labored to load the cars with K8, Circle M, Bar S and Double O beef cattle.

Clouds of dust eddied up from the corrals, cattle bawled, while the rattle and clank of car couplers, the yelling of cowboys, as they rushed the unwilling travelers up the chute and into the cars, made a bedlam of sound.

In the thick of the dust, grime and noise was Bud White, McLeod's foreman, a young man, well built, bronzed as an Indian; a top-hand cowboy. His mop of blonde hair stood up like the roach on a grizzly.

On the wide top-board of the loading-corral, standing near the loading chute, was Bart McLeod, his huge figure clothed in a white silk shirt, a pair of gray trousers, tucked in the tops of his laced boots, and on his head was a great black Stetson, encircled with a silver-studded band, which flashed back the rays of the sun. He chewed reflectively on a cigar, as the dust eddied around him.

From where he stood he could see more cattle, bunched out on a flat about a quarter of a mile away, being held by two riders. The loading corral was not large enough to hold all of the shipment.

As he watched the loading a rider circled the fence and came up behind him. It was a girl of about twenty, wearing a divided skirt and riding a heavy stock saddle, atop a roan bronco. She was of medium height, rather slender; a wistful-eyed girl, with an oval face, hatless, and with her dark brown hair braided and coiled around her head.

McLeod grinned at her as she dismounted and climbed up beside him.

"How's Sandy actin'?" he asked, squinting at the roan, which was peering at the turmoil within the corral, its ears cocked forward inquiringly.

"Fine, Dad," Mazie McLeod laughed and waved a gloved hand at Bud White, who was wig-wagging at her with the wagon-spoke he was using for offense and defense.

"Whew! Isn't this dust awful? I don't see why you stand here and eat it, Dad. You don't have to, you know." Mazie made a face and slapped her skirt with the braided quirt, looped to her right wrist.

"It don't bother me, Mazie," replied McLeod. "I like it."

He looked somberly off across the hills and his eyes narrowed at the thoughts of sheep ever coming to Smoky River. Slowly his bulging jaws chewed on his cigar. The girl looked at him, and she, too, looked out across the hills.

"You're thinking of sheep, Dad," softly.

McLeod nodded.

"Yeah, I am, Mazie. I was just wonderin' how it would seem to lose Smoky River to the sheep. The hills over there would be dust-heaps in a short time. A hundred thousand sheep would ruin Smoky River Valley in a year. Sheep eat to the roots, and then tear out the roots with their hoofs. Nothing lives behind the sheep."

"But they can't come here," murmured

the girl. "Brawley never can put his sheep in here, as long as you won't let him."

Bart McLeod shook his head. "That's right."

"As long as your men are loyal to you, Dad."

"Eh?" McLeod removed his cigar and glanced sidewise at her. This was something he had never thought about. "Why do you say that, Mazie?"

"Why, I don't know, I'm sure. It just came out. But there's no worry on that score. Every one of our men hate sheep as much as you do."

Bud White left the struggle at the loading-chute and came over to them, springing up to catch his toe half-way up the fence, and vaulting to the top with the ease and grace of a trained acrobat.

"You look like a war-path Indian," laughed Mazie. Bud wiped his face with a none-too-clean sleeve, and laughed with her. "Lordy, it's sure hot down there. If I was a cow down there, I'd fight for a chance to get into a nice ventilated car, instead of actin' like they are."

"Not if you knew you were going to the slaughter," said the girl soberly.

"Well, they don't know that, Mazie. It's all in a lifetime to them."

"What they don't know won't hurt 'em," said McLeod.

"They're a whole lot like human beings, thataway," smiled Bud. He turned to McLeod. "Anythin' new?" he asked.

"Not a thing," McLeod threw his cigar away and shook his head.

"Well, I'm going," declared the girl. "If you want to stay here and eat dust—help yourself."

She climbed down, mounted her horse and rode away, while the two men watched her.

"Sandy is a pretty good lookin' horse," observed Bud. McLeod squinted sidewise at Bud. "Why don't yuh say what yuh mean, Bud. You wasn't lookin' at Sandy."

"Aw-w-w-w shucks!" grunted Bud. "I was, too."

"Then you ain't young—and human, Bud." McLeod spat out some dust and climbed off the fence, going over to the town, while Bud went back to his work, a grin on his streaked face.

McLeod went to the bank, where he was cordially greeted by the cashier, transacted a little business, and went to the post office for the ranch mail. Gil Brant met him at the door of the post office and they went in together.

"Shipping some beef today, eh?" asked Brant.

McLeod nodded pleasantly. He rather liked this good looking gambler. McLeod was not above trying to out-guess the roulette-wheel at times. The postmaster gave him the ranch mail, and spoke to Brant—

"Have you got a man named Jim Smith working for you?"

McLeod glanced quickly at Brant, who replied that he had.

"He's one of my swampers," smiled Brant. "Anyway, that's his name, and he's the only Jim Smith I know around here."

The postmaster handed Brant a letter, addressed to Jim Smith, and was postmarked Oro Madre. Brant put it in his pocket and went back across the street, while McLeod leaned against a counter and wondered just what Jim Smith, if this was the same Jim Smith, was doing in Meteor City.

Absently he glanced through the few letters, his mind harking back to that night stage, when Jim Smith rode beside him from Oro Madre to Colton. He realized that he had not got a good view of Smith's face, and it would be impossible for him to recognize him as the same man.

Glancing down at the letters he noticed that one of them was for Bud White. He stiffened slightly as he noticed the return address—V. B. Colton, Colo.

"V. B.," muttered McLeod. "Vint Brawley. Why is he writin' to my foreman?"

There was no one in the office, except McLeod and the postmaster, who was behind his little coop, stamping letters. The envelope was poorly sealed. Running his finger under the flap he snapped it loose and drew out the single sheet of paper, on which had been written in pencil:

Bud White, Meteor City.
Can't do business on them terms. Better run up here and talk it over with me.
V. Brawley.

The letters seemed to burn into McLeod's soul, and his face went white with realization of Bud's duplicity. He was trying to sell out to Brawley, but the price was too high, it seemed.

McLeod crushed the letter in his hand and walked outside. It was unbelievable to him—impossible. Yet, he held the proof in his hand; the proof that would damn the boy he had made foreman of the Circle M; the boy he had loved like a son.

Men came past him, calling him by name, but he did not look at them; did not hear them. Mazie's words came back to him—

"As long as they are loyal to you."

"Loyalty!" he groaned to himself. "When Bud White turns on me—where can I look for loyalty? Oh, the poor —— fool."

He lurched off the sidewalk and went to a hitch-rack where he got his horse. But he did not go to the loading-corrals and denounce Bud White.

"I've got to stand it," he told himself. "I'll get that letter to him, but he won't *know I seen it. Give him plenty of rope and he'll hang himself.*"

BUT McLeod did not get a chance to get the letter to Bud White. He put what he supposed was the letter in his pocket and rode out of town; but it was only the envelope.

From the doorway of the Gem saloon, Jim Smith had studied the big cattleman, and had seen him drop the letter as he left the sidewalk. It had fluttered sidewise, landing almost beneath the wooden sidewalk, and a few minutes later Jim Smith sauntered across the street and sat down on the sidewalk, where he cautiously retrieved the piece of paper.

It meant very little to Jim Smith, except that it was from Vint Brawley. He put it in his pocket and went back to the saloon, sauntering around to the Black-Jack game, where little Doc Ellis studied a solitaire lay-out, killing time until the evening play would be resumed.

"Who is Bud White?" asked Smith.

Ellis lifted his eyes from the layout and squinted at the swamper.

"Bud White? He's foreman for Bart McLeod."

"Oh," Smith's eyebrows lifted slightly, as he leaned in closer to Ellis, and said softly—"Is he in with us?"

"In with us?" Ellis laughed softly. "Just like the cattlemen are in with the sheep-men. What in —— ever put that in your mind?"

"I dunno."

Smith wandered away toward the back of the room, passing Gil Brant on the way. Ellis motioned to Brant, who came over to him and sat down.

"Is that feller Smith loco or something?" queried Ellis.

Brant laughed and looked back at Smith, who was looking at a newspaper. "I don't know, Doc—why?"

"He just asked me if Bud White was in with us."

Brant sobered instantly.

"That's a —— of a question."

"To my way of thinkin' it is," agreed Ellis. "But Smith seemed to be serious about it, Gil. What dope did Brawley give you on this Smith person?"

"Straight enough. Smith's name is Sylvester. He killed a man in Denver twenty years ago, thinking the man was Bart McLeod, who had run away with Sylvester's wife. They gave him twenty years, and he's come back to get revenge."

"And McLeod will be looking for him, eh?"

"No, he won't. Sylvester just disappeared. Remember, he went to the pen as Jim Smith. Listen to me, Doc; I'm going to let you in on something. Brawley tells me that this Mrs. Sylvester was about to become a mother, and that Sylvester has a fool notion he can find the kid.

"A few days ago an old prospector named Paw-Paw Jones got fresh with a stick of dynamite. He was one of the real old-timers, I suppose. Anyway, this Jim Smith was with him, when he cashed in. Maybe Smith was trying to find out a few things from the old man.

"Anyway, the old man had made a strike—a rich one. He was dying, I suppose without leaving a will, and he told Smith to see that Nellie got the property. I think the doctor told Smith he would write a letter to him here. This was up at Ora Madre, Doc."

"Nellie?" Doc Ellis was puzzled for a moment. "What Nellie, Gil?"

"Our Nellie," Brant laughed softly. "That black-haired singer—the one that looks like a Madonna."

"Well, for ——'s sake!" breathed Ellis. "An old sour-dough leaving a fortune for our little Nell. Can yuh beat that?"

"You can't," grinned Brant. "I suppose old Jones had been here and heard her sing. Those old birds are soft-hearted, and Nellie sure looks innocent. She's a pleasant sort of a kid."

"But where did you get all this dope?" asked Ellis. "Did Brawley—"

"Not a chance," smiled Brant. "A letter came today for Mr. Smith—and I opened it. Had to be sure who he was getting mail from, Doc. But here's the dope. Old Smith has been watching Nellie ever since he came here. I wondered why—and now I know. He's got a hunch that Nellie is his daughter."

"No!" Doc Ellis choked slightly. "The poor old fool."

"Don't jump too quick," warned Brant. "The old man may not be far off the bull's-eye. Nellie don't know who she is. She was raised in a sort of a convent in Denver, where they kept her until she made a get-away about five years ago. That's where she learned music, Doc. She's about twenty. Now go ahead and laugh."

"Well, don't that beat ——? But how could she ever prove who she is?"

"McLeod might know," suggested Brant.

"Mm-m-m-m. Did you give Smith his letter?"

"Do you think I'm a fool? That mine is worth a fortune, I tell you. If Nellie is his daughter, and gets the mine—where would we come in? I've an idea she'd be hard to handle—that little honkytonk song-bird. No, Doc," Brant shook his head slowly, "The girl we send up there will be named Nellie, but she won't be the one old Paw-Paw Jones meant."

Several cowboys were coming down the sidewalk, rattling the loose boards, as they headed for the Gem bar. They were dusty, tired from loading stock, thirsty with the thirst of men who have breathed dust for hours. At their head was Bud White.

They lined up at the bar, calling loudly for their favorite beverage. Bud White took his drink, asked for a large glass of water, which he gulped down, and walked toward the rear of the room, while the others scraped their boot-soles on the bar-rail and talked in loud voices.

Jim Smith looked up from his paper and the dust-streaked face of Bud White, who had stopped beside a pool-table, spinning the balls with his strong fingers. For several moments the swamper studied the face of the big cowboy, wondering if this young man was really a traitor to his own employer.

Bud turned from the table and saw the old man looking at him.

"Kinda hot today, old-timer," smiled Bud.

"I reckon it is. Mebby I've got somethin' that belongs to you, White."

Smith reached in his pocket and handed Bud the folded letter, which the cowboy took, wondering what it was all about. He smoothed out the paper and read it quickly, his brow wrinkled with amazement. He looked at Smith, with the blank look of a man who is deeply puzzled. Then he read it again, crumpled the paper in his hand and stepped in close to Smith.

"What does this mean?" asked Bud hoarsely.

"I don't know," said Smith. "I found it in the street."

"You lie! Why would Vint Brawley write to me?"

"I don't know," protested Smith, drawing back as the big cowboy towered over him. "It ain't none of my business. I didn't even know who yuh was, until I asked one of the boys."

"Yeah?" Bud drew back. He did not want to start a scene with a stranger. "Who else has seen this letter?"

"I don't know, White. I found it so I gave it to you."

Bud's face had gone white beneath the dust and grime. He felt that this old man was telling the truth. Nodding shortly he walked away, passed the boys at the bar, and went out. Both Brant and Ellis had seen Smith give White a paper, and had also seen enough to know that it had greatly agitated the big cowpuncher.

"Now, what do yuh suppose that was?" whispered Ellis, as White went outside. "White's sore as —— over something, Gil."

"It's some important, that's a cinch," said Brant. "I believe we had better keep an eye on Mr. Smith, the swamper. He might have fooled Vint Brawley, but he better not try to fool us, or I'll drown him in his own bucket of suds."

Bud White went back to the loading corrals, his mind in a whirl. He wondered who had lost that letter? Or was it just some of Vint Brawley's hirelings trying to put him in bad repute? He knew that Brawley was not above doing anything to break the morale of the cattlemen.

The cars were nearly all loaded. A little, wizen-faced old cowboy emerged from a gate, wiping the dirt from his face, as he fastened the staple. He was "Jumpin'"

Bean, one of Bud's Bar S cowboys, a philosophical sort of an old ranger; one of the old time breed of cowpunchers.

"Hyah, Bud," he croaked. I've shore et a lot of dust t'day. Last car bein' loaded. Wisht the ocean was right here; I'd shore jump into her."

Bud tried to smile, but failed. Ordinarily Jumpin' Bean was good for a laugh, but not this time. The old man noticed Bud's expression.

"What's eatin' yuh, son?" he asked.

"Somethin' rotten," said Bud huskily. He knew Jumpin' Bean was absolutely trustworthy, and very wise in his own way. Bud drew out the paper and let the old man read it. It took Jumpin' several moments to get the full import of the note. He blew up his cheeks, exploded noisly and demanded more information.

Bud explained how he had received the note.

"Do yuh reckon it was jist a frame-up?" queried Jumpin'. "Mebby it was jist to git yore nerve, son. That'd shore look sour to anybody that didn't know yuh."

"It looks as though I was dickerin' to sell out to Vint Brawley, Jumpin'. Things like that have been done, yuh know."

"Human bein's might do anythin'," nodded Jumpin'. "'S too bad yuh can't stuff that down Brawley's skinny neck."

Bud looked up quickly. He had been thinking the same thing. The last cattle-car had been loaded, and the boys were climbing over the corral fence. In a few minutes the long string of cars would head North. Bud turned quickly to Jumpin'.

"I'm goin' to Colton," he said. "I'll ride the caboose. I can get a train back tomorrow mornin', Jumpin'. Don't tell anybody where I've gone." He slapped the old cowboy on the shoulder, turned and ran down the line of cars to the caboose, where he swung on just as the train began to move ahead.

"I'm goin' to Colton," Bud told the conductor.

"All right," nodded the grizzled employe. "Glad to have you. Go in and make yourself to home."

Jumpin' Bean watched the train swing back on the main line and head for the Gateway. He shook his head and started toward the main street, bow-legging his way along, a grim smile on his lips.

"Mister Brawley had better have his digestive dinguses in shape to handle writin-paper," he declared. "The pen may be mightier 'n the sword, but a Colt six-gun's got 'em both skinned."

He came into the main street and headed for the Gem, but stopped half-way along the sidewalk. Across the street was Bart McLeod, out in the street in front of the post office. He seemed to be searching for something, because he stooped over and peered under the sidewalk.

Jumpin' walked over to him and McLeod got back on the sidewalk.

"Hyah, Mr. McLeod," greeted Jumpin'. "Didja lose somethin'? I seen yuh kinda lookin' around."

McLeod nodded shortly.

"I lost a letter, Bean. Thought I put it in my pocket with the envelope, but must have lost it. I searched all the way back."

"Important?" asked Jumpin'. McLeod's face hardened. After a moment's reflection he nodded and walked back to his horse. Jumpin' watched him ride out of town. The old cowboy was sure McLeod had lost the letter that Bud carried.

"——!" snorted Jumpin' Bean explosively. "If McLeod did have that letter. it'll be tough for Bud. But if he did, what —— right did McLeod have to open Bud's mail? Huh! Mebby Vint Brawley's name was on the outside of the envelope. Well, I've got to get a drink before I can think—— my brain's dusty."

Bart McLeod rode out of town and swung his horse toward the loading-corrals, where several of the boys were cinching up their saddled, preparing to go back to the ranches.

"Where's Bud?" asked McLeod.

Curley Steele, one of the Double O cowboys, stepped away from his horse and answered McLeod:

"I dunno, Mr. McLeod. When the train pulled out he jumped into the caboose, and when the train went past the corral, Bud was settin' inside, talkin' to a brakeman. He didn't get off."

"Thanks, Curley," McLeod turned his horse and rode toward home. He knew that the train would not stop short of Colton, unless it had orders to take a siding.

"It looks to me as though Bud White didn't wait to get the letter that would tell him his price was too high," reflected McLeod bitterly. "Bud knows every defense we've got; so we've got to be on guard stronger than ever from now on."

IT WAS after dark when the cattle-train ground to a stop at Colton, pulling in on a siding. Bud shook hands with the conductor and walked away from the depot. Bud knew Colton as well as he knew Meteor City, and he knew just where Vint Brawley's shack was located. And Bud also knew that he was in dangerous territory.

He walked up the street to a little café, where he ate his supper. Several men came in to eat, but paid no attention to Bud, whose general appearance, as far as clothes were concerned, was no different than the rest of the men in Colton.

After his dinner he wandered out and headed for Brawley's shack, which he found in darkness. It was too early in the evening for Brawley to be in bed, he decided, so he went back to the street. A little later he found Brawley in a saloon, drinking with several other men. In fact, Brawley seemed partly under the influence of liquor.

Bud stood on the edge of the sidewalk and studied Brawley through the window. The sheep-man was taller than any man in the room, his long gray hair curling over the collar of his faded shirt, his crooked, yellow teeth showing in a grin.

Two men came from the saloon, passing close to Bud. One of them looked closely at Bud, who turned quickly, realizing that the lights from the saloon shown directly in his face. But the men went on.

Bud could hear some one urging Brawley to have a drink, and the big sheep-man was trying to refuse.

"I've got enough," declared Brawley. "Go ahead and drink yourself flat on the floor, if yuh want to. I've got enough, and I'm goin' home."

Bud could see Brawley's two dogs, lying under a card-table, and when Brawley spoke of going home, they both got up and went to him.

Bud had heard of those two dogs, who guarded Brawley's shack, and he knew it would be impossible to get into that shack without first killing the dogs. He stepped away from the lights and hurried back to Brawley's home.

The door was unlocked. But went inside, lighted a match, cupping it cautiously in his palms, and looked the place over. Then he went to the rear room, where Brawley slept, and sat down on the bed in the darkness.

It was possibly fifteen minutes later that Brawley and his two dogs came home. Bud could hear Brawley talking to the dogs, which stayed outside. Brawley shut the door and lighted the lamp on his kitchen table, humming unmusically, as he picked up his pipe and knocked it against the top of the stove.

Filling it with tobacco, he lighted it, picked up the lamp and came into the room with Bud. Brawley started slightly as he caught sight of Bud, sitting on the bed, and his hand trembled a little as he placed the lamp on a small table.

He noticed that Bud had a six-shooter in his right hand. Brawley did not have a gun on him now. He turned and looked at Bud.

"Well?" he said slowly. "What do you want, Bud White?"

Bud took the letter from his pocket and handed it to Brawley, who glanced at it, but did not read it. He seemed amused.

"Why did you send that to me?" asked Bud.

"Because yore price was too high."

"Too high? What do yuh mean, Brawley? What price?"

Brawley laughed.

"Every man has a price, White. I didn't know what your price would be; but I took a chance to tell you that it was too high."

"In other words, you send me a letter of this kind, thinkin' that Bart McLeod would see it or find out about it. It's just some more of your dirty fightin', Vint Brawley."

"All right," Brawley's jaws tightened. "Everythin' is fair in war—and this is war. Now, what are yuh goin' to do about it?"

"What am I goin' to do?" Bud smiled grimly. "I'm goin' to make you chew up that letter and swaller it; *sabe;* and then I'm goin' to make you write another letter, tellin' the world that the other letter was a lie."

"Yo're goin' to make me, eh?"

"Yeah. You'll either do it, Brawley, or I'll pistol-whip you until yuh won't know a sheep from an elephant."

"Is that so?" Brawley showed his yellow teeth in a wolfish grin. "Pistol whip me, eh? And me old enough to be yore father."

"And mean enough to be the father of the devil," retorted Bud. "Start eatin'."

"Eh? Oh, yeah. Say, White, I like you. I didn't think any of your outfit would have guts enough to trap me in my own town and in my own home. You're all right, and I'd like to have you on my side. How about it, eh? I can pay you more than Bart McLeod can—twice as much."

"Start eatin'," said Bud softly. "I'll give you three seconds to start, Brawley. When I count three, you'll be eatin' that letter, or yuh won't eat anythin' until yuh come from the hospital."

BRAWLEY squinted closely at Bud. Brawley was a judge of men, and he could see that this big cowpuncher was in deadly earnest.

"One," tolled Bud softly. But before he could count two, Brawley was eating. He shoved the sheet of paper in his big mough and began chewing. It was no easy task. Little by little he made pulp of that tough paper, the drool running from the corners of his crooked mouth, his eyes half-shut. It was a terrible thing to do, to swallow that pulp. It choked him, caused tears to run down his cheeks, and once or twice he retched over it, but at last it was all down.

Brawley was mad and sick. His face was pale, and his big hands opened and shut convulsively at the ignominy of it all. To think of a kid cowboy forcing him, the biggest sheep owner in the Colton ranges, to eat a letter.

"I wish I had a bottle of ink," said Bud slowly, "You act like yuh was dry, and the ink would make a good chaser."

"—— you, you'll pay for this," gulped Brawley, clutching his knees.

"Don't talk about me payin'," said Bud. "You ain't paid yore score yet, Brawley. Get yore pencil and paper. I'll tell yuh what to write, and you'll sign yore name. I think yore paper and pencil are on the table beside the lamp."

Brawley turned to the table and picked up the tablet. It was the same kind of paper he had just eaten, and the sight of it hurt him internally. He turned back. There was only one thing for him to do and that was to humor this nervy cowpuncher and try to stop him before he left Colton.

"Are yuh ready, Brawley?" asked Bud. Brawley nodded, gripping the pencil in his big fingers, which itched to get at the throat of the man on the bed. Outside a dog growled. Bud listened closely, but the growl was not repeated.

"You was kinda smart, gettin' here ahead of the dogs," said Brawley. "They won't let anybody near here. What do yuh want me to write?"

"To whom it may concern," said Bud uneasily. He did not like the idea of that growl. He glanced quickly behind him, noticing for the first time that there was a window behind the bed, over which the shade was drawn half-way down. He turned quickly. Brawley was writing, his head down, big fingers making hard work of the opening sentence.

"Ready for more?" asked Bud softly. Brawley nodded.

"The letter I sent Bud White was a lie."

"The—letter—I—sent—Bud—white—"

Came the crash of breaking glass at the window, and Bud whirled to look into the muzzles of a double-barreled shotgun, which had been shoved through the window, almost against him.

"Drop yore gun!" snapped a voice, and at the same instant Vint Brawley had flung himself into Bud, crashing him back against the bed, while he cramped Bud's gun-hand into a helpless position.

IT WAS over in a moment. A man came in the front door, while the man with the shotgun opened the window and crawled into the room. They were the two men who had passed Bud in front of the saloon when he was watching Vint Brawley.

"Good work, boys," said Brawley, breathing heavily from his exertion. "I wish you'd been sooner. Better rope that jugheaded buckaroo. There's a lariat in the corner."

In a few minutes Bud was trussed up like a mummy, flung back on the bed, to be laughed at by Brawley.

"We seen him in front of the Rawhide saloon," said one of the men. "He was a stranger. We came back to the Rawhide and you had gone home. We can't find this stranger; so we thought it might be worth while to take a look up this way."

"I heard the dog growl," said Brawley. "I was afraid our friend might get uneasy. I knew it was one or both of you boys, because nobody else can come near here."

One of them laughed.

"I shore whispered pretty loud to Mike. He knows me. What was this feller tryin' to do to yuh, boss?"

"Well, quite a lot," grinned Brawley. "But not as much as I'll do to him. By

——, I ought to cut off his —— ears and send 'em back to Bart McLeod."

"One of McLeod's men, eh?"

"——, he's the foreman!"

"——, this sure is luck. What's the verdict?"

Brawley walked over and looked down at Bud, who was unable to move hand or foot, so tightly was he bound.

"Make me eat paper, will yuh?" snarled Brawley. "You fool, did you think you'd get away with a thing like that?"

"Anyway, I made yuh eat it," retorted Bud. "Go ahead and get it over with you half-skunk, half-Apache."

"Want it over with quick, eh?" Brawley laughed heartily. "Half-skunk, eh? I ought to cram the rest of that tablet down your throat and tamp it in with the barrel of your own six-gun, you poor fool. Yore pride brought you up here to make old man Brawley eat a letter, eh. You cattlemen are pretty —— proud, ain't yuh? Old Bart McLeod hates sheep pretty bad, don't he? And they tell me yore kinda sweet on McLeod's daughter. Yore pride! —— you, when I get through with you, you won't have any left."

Brawley turned from Bud, rubbing his hands on his hips, his mouth wide in a silent laugh.

"Boys, I'm askin' you to do a big job tonight. It's a favor I won't forget. Can you swipe a hand-car from the section-house?"

"Swipe a hand-car?" The two men looked at each other.

"Yeah. You know what I mean."

"I reckon we could," grinned one of the men. "They've got two of 'em over there, and there's only one locked in the car-house."

"That's good enough," nodded Brawley. "You boys are goin' to take a long ride tonight, and when you get through with the car, you can shove it in the ditch and come back on a train. Find out, if yuh can, how the trains are runnin'. Yuh don't want to get run down, yuh know."

"How soon do yuh want us to get it?" asked one of the men.

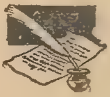
"Just as soon as yuh can. Put it on the track below the section house, far enough away so nobody will see it, and then come back here."

The two men left the house. Brawley lighted his pipe and sat down, looking at Bud, his lips drawn back from the big teeth that gripped his old pipe.

"What's the idea?" queried Bud coldly.

"Payin' yuh back, White. I'm sure indebted to yuh, young man; and Vint Brawley usually pays back with interest. When I get through with you, you'll wish you'd stayed at home and minded yore own business. Nobody down there will want yuh, that's a cinch—and we don't want yuh."

Brawley laughed and blew smoke-rings at the ceiling, while Bud stared up at the vanishing rings wondering what Brawley meant.



NEITHER Brant nor Doc Ellis questioned Smith, the swamper, about the letter he had given Bud White, but Brant made up his mind to watch Smith closely. By careful questioning Smith found that Bud White was McLeod's most trusted man, and that Bud was keeping company with Mazie McLeod. Smith knew that McLeod had lost that letter, after reading it. And, judging from its contents, Bud White was trying to sell out to Vint Brawley. Which was all right with Smith.

He went to the post-office and asked if any letters had arrived for Jim Smith.

"Are you working at the Gem?" inquired the postmaster.

"Yeah."

"There was a letter for you today, Mr. Smith. I gave it to Mr. Brant to give you."

"Oh, yeah," Smith nodded absently and went out. It was queer that Brant had not given it to him, he thought. He knew it must be from the doctor at Oro Madre, because no one else would write to him at Meteor City.

He went back to the Gem and met Brant near the door. The gambler knew that Smith had been to the postoffice.

"How do you like your job, Smith?" asked Brant, as they stood together near the door.

"All right," indifferently. "Brant, do you know anythin' about McLeod's family?"

"You mean about his wife and daughter?"

"Yeah."

"Not much. I understand she was a widow when McLeod married her—a widow with one child."

"How long have they been married?"

"I don't know, Smith. It wouldn't be hard to find out."

Smith nodded. "I suppose not. I'm

kinda lookin' for a letter, and when it comes I may have to leave for a few days."

"Yes?" Brant glanced quickly at the old swamper, but he did not look up.

"It might be put with the Gem mail," said Smith. "I told the postmaster I was workin' over here."

"All right," said Brant. Smith turned and walked to the rear of the room, where two of the dance-hall girls were beating out a tune on the old upright piano, while Doc Ellis essayed to sing.

Brant knew that Smith had asked for mail, and he felt sure that Smith knew where that letter had gone. And it would not help Brant and Doc Ellis in their scheme to substitute another girl for the one named Nellie. If Smith knew that Brant had that letter, he would also know that Brant had opened and read it—and Smith would probably communicate with the doctor at Oro Madre, asking for a copy of that letter.

Brant noticed that Nellie had come to the room and was standing near the orchestra platform, listening with an amused expression to Doc Ellis' rendition of a popular ballad. Doc was a much better dealer than a singer.

Nellie was by long odds the prettiest girl in the Gem. Dissipation had not marred her girlish beauty to any extent. Because of her contralto voice, which had received some little training, she was considered several notches above the average dance-hall girl.

Her actions and dress were more refined, and Brant felt, for the first time, that Nellie seemed out of place. He had designated her as the girl who looked like a Madonna, jokingly. Now he realized that it was not such a joke as he thought. Her hair was a light brown, almost blond, parted in the center and gathered in a knot at the nape of her neck. Her forehead was broad, her eyes wide and luminous blue; her nose slightly tilted.

Instead of short skirts and spangles, she wore a clinging blue dress of some soft material, and there was barely a glimpse of blue stocking between the bottom hem and the top of her high-heeled dancing slipper.

"Some of the other girls have got a —— of a lot to learn about attractive clothes," decided Brant, as he watched Nellie, exchanging a few words with Muddy Poole, the gray-mustached dealer, who was always courteous to the girls.

Poole left her and went across the room. Smith had been standing near Nellie, and now he moved in closer to her, speaking of her singing. Smith had never had an opportunity to talk with her.

She answered him pleasantly.

"Did you ever know an old miner named Paw-Paw Jones?" he asked, lowering his voice, because Doc Ellis had finished his song.

"Paw-Paw Jones?" Nellie laughed softly, nodding. "A funny old prospector. Yes, I know him. He used to come here once in a while, get awful drunk and insist on sitting on the orchestra platform while I was singing."

"He died a short time ago," said Smith. "Dynamite explosion."

The girl sobered quickly.

"Is that a fact? Oh, I'm sorry. He was such a nice old fellow. He always minded his own business and was so happy when any of the girls would have a drink with him. I talked with him one day for a long time. He was sober at that time, and he told me of the big strike he was going to make." The girl sighed deeply. "They are always going to make a big strike. Faith keeps them going, I suppose."

"Did he ever say anythin' about—" Smith stopped talking, when Gill Brant walked in behind the girl. She turned and smiled at Brant.

"The swamper was just telling me that Paw-Paw Jones died a few days ago," she said to Brant. "You remember him, don't you? He used to insist on sitting on the orchestra platform when I was singing?"

"It seems to me that I do," replied Brant. "I don't remember much about it, Nellie." Brant turned to Smith. "I wish you'd clean out my room today, Smith. Give those rugs a good beating and scrub the floor."

Smith nodded and turned away. The girl watched him slouch toward the rear of the room, and turned to Brant.

"Queer old fellow," she said.

"Queer," laughed Brant. "Half-locoed. Imagines every girl he sees is his missing daughter. He'll probably claim you, if he hasn't already."

Nellie laughed throatily. "He hasn't—yet. But did he lose his daughter?"

"No, I don't think so. Just a queer kink, Nellie. He's harmless, and there's nobody to take care of him; so I gave him a job."

"That was nice of you, Gil."

Brant shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he's able to do the work, if he's told what to do. What was he telling you about Paw-Paw Jones."

"Oh, just that he was dead."

"Yeah? I wonder how Smith knew that Paw-Paw Jones ever came to Meteor City? Smith never was here before."

"Why, I don't know, Gil. He asked me if I ever knew Paw-Paw Jones. I don't know why he asked me, unless Jones had mentioned being here. He started to ask me a question when you came up, but didn't finish it."

Brant nodded. He had heard the question, as far as it had been asked. The girls called to Nellie, who climbed up on the platform. Doc Ellis came down to Brant and they walked to the bar.

"Smith was talking to Nellie," said Brant. "He's been over to the post office and very likely he found out that I got his letter. He was asking Nellie about Paw-Paw Jones, and I think I arrived just in time to stop him from telling her something."

"Complicates matters," nodded Ellis. "If he knows we got his letter, he'll suspect something. How about writing him a letter, putting it in that envelope and mixing it with the Gem mail tomorrow? I can do it, Brant. We'll tell him that the stuff is all off as far as Nellie is concerned. Make it appear that the authorities won't stand for a verbal will."

"Fine, except for one thing, Doc Smith knows that a letter came for him today. He's been looking for that letter. Nobody else would write to Jim Smith at Meteor. Now, if he got another letter tomorrow, he'd suspect something."

"All right," grinned Doc Ellis. "We'll mention the other letter, Gil. Say that this second letter was sent, because after due consideration, the authorities decided against Nellie. If we mention the other letter, that will sure throw Smith off the track."

"That's the ticket!" exclaimed Brant. "Doc, you've got a head. We'll frame up that letter tonight. You can copy the writing near enough to correspond with that on the envelope."

Brant reached in his inside coat pocket and drew out some old letters, bank-book, etc. After a hasty glance through them he shoved them back in his pocket, turned on his heel and went to his room at the rear of the building, where Smith was busy with a broom and a mop.

"Pretty dirty, eh?" said Brant pleasantly, as he crossed the room to a little closet.

"Yeah, pretty dirty," nodded Smith. Brant took down another coat, the one he had been wearing earlier in the day, and removed a bundle of papers and envelopes from the inside pocket. Replacing the coat he walked out and went back to the bar, where Doc Ellis was waiting for him.

Brant went swiftly through the package of papers, scowling heavily. Then he separated them, placing them one at a time on the bar, until he had examined each one. Then he squinted at Doc Ellis and shook his head.

"Gone," he said softly. "I left it in another coat in my closet. —— that swamper!"

Doc Ellis grimaced at himself in the back-bar mirror.

"Well," he said philosophically, "I won't have to be a forger, it seems."

"You may have to be worse," said Brant grimly. "I'm —— if I'll let a swamper get the best of me."

"And you chased him away from Nellie," smiled Doc. "You sent him to swamp out your room, you know, Gil."

"You don't need to rub it in, Doc. If worst comes to the worst, I'll marry Nellie myself."

"You will, eh?" Ellis squinted at the back-bar mirror. He had been thinking the same thing himself.

"Even if she is a dance-hall fluzie," said Brant, squinting at Nellie, who was practicing a new song.

"Well, she's as good as you are," said Ellis. "What are we, when you come right down to bed-rock?"

Brant turned his head and looked at little Doc Ellis, whose head barely came up to Brant's shoulder. And there was a peculiar expression in Brant's green eyes, as he considered his little dealer. He glanced over at Nellie and laughed shortly.

"So-that's how it lays, eh, Doc? Well, we'll see how it works out."

Brant shoved away from the bar and sauntered toward the door. The bartender came in behind Ellis, arranging some glassware on the back-bar.

"Did you want a drink, Doc?" he asked. The little gambler turned and leaned his elbows on the bar.

"Yes, I do, Chuck. Give me a tall one. How does my voice compare with Nellie's?"

The bartender listened for a moment, as the singer finished the chorus. Then he shoved out some glasses and the bottle.

"Well, I'll tell yuh, Doc," he said seriously. "I reckon the boss didn't make any mistake when he hired you to deal Black-Jack, instead of Nellie."

DOC ELLIS laughed and moved away as Jumpin' Bean, Curley Steele and Abel Strauss came in and clumped up to the bar. Abel was the cook at the K8, a short, fat, broad-faced German, famous for his cooking and for his utter lack of understanding.

"I can't stay mooch, Yumpin'," he explained heavily. "I've got de mool unt schmall vagon for gettin' some groceries."

"Ne' mind the groceries," grinned Jumpin'. "Them there danged K8's ought to diet a little once in a while."

"Diet!" exploded Abel. "Von pie each a meal. Um-m-m-ha-a-ah. I haf a drink unt go back."

"Listen, Abel," said Jumpin' seriously. "We jist sent out the biggest train of cows that ever went out of Smoky; a' we're out to have a big night."

"Yah?" said Abel expansively. "Dot's goot. I haf a drink unt den I get mine mool unt go home."

Jumpin' Bean leaned his elbows on the bar and shook his head wearily.

"You tell 'm, Curley."

Curley Steele cleared his throat heavily and squinted at Abel. Curley's hair was of a light roan color and as straight as the proverbial string. It stood up on his head, fuzzed out from any number of cow-licks, like patches of fox-tail grass.

His nose had been broken twice, and allowed to grow back in its own sweet way, and a rodeo bucker had thrown Curley and stepped on Curley's jaw a few years ago, knocking it slightly out of plumb.

Taking him all in all, his features were all out of drawing, one shoulder slightly drooped from a badly set break, and his legs bowed visibly. Otherwise he was a normal young man, with a great thirst and an optimistic outlook on life.

"It's like this, Abel," he told the stolid cook. "We like yuh, and we want yuh to celebrate with us."

"Chust von more drink, unt I gets my mool," said Abel firmly.

"I buy this one," said Curley generously. "You can buy the next one, and then it's the bartender's treat."

"And forget the mule," grinned Jumpin'. "What's a mule, more or less, anyway?"

"A chackus," said Abel. He grinned expansively. "Mools iss mools. Dot mool iss a sson-of-a guns. He has ideas."

"Well, why in —— don't the K8 give yuh a horse, Abel?"

"A horse I don't vant. You t'ink I vant to be a runavay all by myself? Nix. Balking iss not bad; running iss vorse."

"What's the mule's name?" asked Curley.

"Chulius. I buy von drink now, unt den I go mit der mool. I drink some schnapps now. Der beer iss varm. O-o-o-o-le-ay-hoo-o-o-o-o, lay-oo—"

"Not sing," interrupted Jumpin'. "Not yet, Abel."

"Dot iss not sing, Yumpin'; dot iss Sviss yoodeling."

"O-o-o-o-oh, bury me-e-e-e not on the lo-o-one—" Curley's voice cracked badly and the bartender blinked painfully, as he set out fresh glasses, fulfilling his obligation.

"We'll have one more round," stated Jumpin'. "I'll buy, Curley will buy, Abel will buy and the bartender will buy. Then Abel can go home with his —— mule."

Abel digested this. It was rather difficult for him to understand it, and he asked Jumpin' to repeat it. Very patiently the Bar S cowboy explained that after four more drinks Abel might get his mule and go back to the K 8.

"Yah?" Abel leaned his elbows on the bar and began crying.

"Hey! What the —— has gone wrong with you?" demanded Curley.

"O-o-o-oh," wailed Abel. "You vant to get rid mit me. You vant to send me avay mit dot —— mool. Chust because I'm only der cook, you t'ink I haf no feelings. O-o-o-o-oh!"

"I can see," said Jumpin', "where the K8 outfit will have to cook their own breakfast. I hope the mule won't miss yuh too much, Abel."

"Dot mool makes me no nefer mind," declared Abel tearfully. "I'm a man amongs men, py golly! Der only t'ing wrong iss dot maybe I out of money gets pretty quick. Pretty soon ve sing, eh?"

"Yea-a-ah, I reckon we will," laughed

Jumpin'. "But it won't be until we're in such a shape that we can't hear each other."

Gil Brant could see that these three McLeod employes were headed toward a hectic evening. He found Smith, the swamper, at the rear of the place, and drew him aside, handing him a ten-dollar bill.

"Get in with those three half-drunken pirates, Smith," he said. "That fellow Bean is pretty close to McLeod, and Bean is at the Gateway ranch. Get drunk with 'em, if you have to, but stay sober enough to hear things."

"Mebby they won't stand for me joining 'em, Brant."

"Yes, they will. I don't think that any of them have much money, and they'll welcome a spender."

Smith sauntered up to the bar, moving in close to Curley, who looked owlishly at him.

"I'll buy a drink," announced Smith.

Jumpin' Bean looked him over appraisingly. Jumpin' was not drunk, but he had a fairly good start.

"Tha's good," said Curley. "Welcome, stranger."

"My name's Smith."

"Oh, is tha' so?" Curley tried to act surprized. "I used to know a man of that same name, Misser Smith. There's a fam'ly reshemblance. Misser Smith, I make you used to Misser Bean and Misser Strauss. Misser Strauss is a mule-skinner."

Smith shook hands gravely with Jumpin' and Abel, after which he bought a round of drinks, thereby establishing himself as one of the gang. In fact, Smith became prodigal with Gil Brant's ten dollars, much to the enjoyment of Abel, who forgot all about going back to the ranch—even forgot "Chulius, the mool," which had ideas.

Smith's intentions were very good—to begin with—but in a short time he forgot that he was to seek information, and wanted to sing. The evening waxed and waned, and when their resources came to an end, Jumpin' Bean decided that he wanted to go home. But he didn't want to go home alone. Smith wanted to go home, too, but he couldn't remember where he lived. Abel had a faint remembrance that he had driven a mule to Meteor City, and that he had a load of groceries to take back to the K 8 ranch.

But Jumpin' wanted every one to go with him to the Bar S. Curley was neutral. The Double O did not seem to beckon. Then Abel got a shrewd idea, which he proceeded to outline. If they could all get into the little wagon, he'd drive the mule to the Bar S.

This was a wonderful suggestion, applauded by every one. So they staggered all over Meteor City, until they found Julius and the small wagon. Julius was a tall, gaunt animal, with a wicked eye and an uncertain disposition.

"Ve go shome," declared Abel. "Chulius iss goot mool."

Jumpin' got on the seat with Abel, while Curley and Jim Smith managed to fall into the wagon, which was half-filled with sacks of flour and other cook-house *impedimenta*.

"Let 'er go!" yelped Curley. But Julius did not move, even when Abel whacked him with the stub of a whip.

Wham! Jumpin' Bean had drawn his six-shooter and fired into the ground just behind Julius' heels. And Julius moved. It was probably the first time that Julius had been started in just that way. The lurch upset the seat and deposited Jumpin' and Abel on top of Smith and Curley.

But Abel clung to the lines, and they went out of Meteor City, with that tall mule on a fast gallop, while Abel, his face almost buried in a sack of flour, but clinging to the lines with grim determination, while he yelled:

"Vo-o-o-o-o! Vo-o-o-o-o-o! Vo-o-o-o-o-o!"

But Julius knew no master's voice. The light wagon bumped and swayed over the rough road, but headed for the Bar S. It was about a mile from Meteor City to where the wagon-road crossed the railroad.

Jumpin' Bean had managed to extricate himself from the embraces of Curley, get himself upright again, and to take the lines away from Abel, who was still on his back, his feet up in the air over the overturned seat.

Jumpin' managed to wrap the lines around his wrists and fell backward, thereby making a forward movement on the part of Julius almost an impossibility. In fact the pull was so strong that Julius reared up, skidded a little and sat down just across the railroad track, leaving the light wagon almost in the center of the track.

Of course that meant as little to Julius as it did to the occupants of the wagon. Smith was already snoring, while Curley was singing softly to himself.

“Do ve schtop?” asked Abel, looking up at his feet. “Vy iss id, Yumpin’?”

“I shore spiked that mule’s tail to the road,” chuckled Jumpin’. Hey, Smith! Wake up! Curley, here comes a feller with a lantern.”

Curley sat up, as did Abel. A lantern was coming down the railroad, and the rails were humming a little.

“I shee three,” declared Curley.

“Nein,” said Abel.

“My—, you must be drunker ’n I am,” said Curley.

“ ’S comin’ to beat ——!” snorted Jumpin’.

“That there thing,” said Curley soberly, “is a train.”

“Comin’, too!” yelped Jumpin’. “And this —— wagon is in the middle of the track. Git up, Julius!”

Jumpin’ yanked on the lines, yelling at Julius, but the mule refused to get up. Jumpin’ pulled out his gun and shot into the ground behind the mule; but it was evident that Julius was no longer gun-shy.

The revolver shots awoke Smith, who demanded an explanation.

“Whazzat?” Eh? Whazzat?”

“Shomebody shootin’,” explained Curley: “Shootin’ at what?”

“Julius.”

“At Chulius?” queried Abel. “Who shoods at my mool?”

“—— yore mule!” snorted Jumpin’, alarmed at the roar of the rails. “You pelicans better unload before the train hits yuh.”

“Whazzat?” demanded Smith.

“’S a man with a lantern,” laughed Curley. “Jumpin’ is so cock’eyed he thinks a man with a lantern is a train. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Don’ know man with lantern fr’m a train. My ——, he’s iggerant! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!”

“Zasso?” Thus Jumpin’ indignantly. “You wait and shee. I’ll bet you twen’y dollars it’s a train. Put up ’r shut up. Tha’s me. Twen’y dollars says it’s a train.”

“I’ll take that bet,” declared Curley. “Everybody hears the bet.”

“And I hear the train,” yelled Jumpin’. “Look out!”

Jumpin’ made an attempt to jump out of the wagon, but found one foot caught. He was trying to extricate it when the crash came.

THE light was into them before they realized it. Something knocked the wagon from under Jumpin’, and he landed on his back out in the weeds, all the breath knocked from his body.

He struggled back to his feet, wheezing wind into his lungs. Something was doing a great amount of thrashing about, and he found Julius upside down, his two hind feet through the front wheels of the wagon, both shafts splintered off short, and the rest of the wagon missing.

Then Jumpin’, shocked to sobriety, went on a tour of investigation. He found Curley, crawling across the railroad track on his hands and knees. At least he found it was Curley, after lighting a match.

“Who’re you?” asked Curley dazedly.

“There was four of us, if I remember,” said Jumpin’. “I know who you are; you’re Curley Steele. As soon as I identify the other two, I’ll know who I am.”

“Look out!” gasped Curley. “Ghosts, by ——!”

A big, white object was coming toward them out of the gloom; a slow-moving, ghost-like thing.

Bang! Curley took a shot at it, and from the ghost came the wailing voice of Abel Strauss:

“Vere iss Chulius?”

“It’s Abel!” gasped Curley. “Excuse that bullet, Abel.”

“Chimminy cripes!” wailed Abel. “Vat done it?” He came up to them, and Jumpin’ examined him by match-light. He was flour from head to heel.

“I am der cook from K8,” explained Abel. “Haf you seen my mool anyvare?”

“Don’t yuh know me, Abel?” asked Jumpin’.

Jumpin’ held the match up to his face and the cook peered at him closely.

“Nod personally,” he said. “Excoose me, but I vant my mool.”

“No use,” said Jumpin’ sadly. “He’s only got one idea. What in —— became of Smith?”

“Smitty?” Curley was beginning to remember. “Oh, yeah. He was with us, wasn’t he?”

“And I win twenty dollars,” reminded Jumpin’. “It was a train.”

“I reckon it was,” said Curley sadly. “Where’s the wagon?”

“On the cowcatcher, most likely. My

——, it shore hit us in the middle. Julius is over there on the road, handcuffed with the front wheels; the rest of the wagon ain't there. Let's see if we can find Smith."

"I vent oop," stated Abel, "unt I come down. I vant my mool unt vagon. Chimminy, I hurt myself."

"Drunken idiot!" snorted Jumpin'. "C'mon, Curley."

On the other side of the railroad they found a man, who was climbing out of some brush. They were close enough to see him, but in the dark most all men look alike.

"There's Smitty," declared Curley. "Hey! Smitty!"

But the man did not answer. He crawled through the right-of-way fence and started away as fast as he could walk.

"Knocked loco!" snorted Curley. "Prob'ly run wild all the rest of his life, if we don't catch him."

He was heading toward Meteor City, cutting across toward the road, when Curley took out after him, calling him by name. But the man broke into a run, with Curley after him. Jumpin' could hear Abel arguing with Julius. Jumpin' stumbled ahead a few yards and ran into some sort of an obstruction. He scratched a match and saw a hand-car, upside down, all four wheels in the air.

It was then that Jumpin' realized that it had been a hand-car instead of a train which had hit them. Something moved in the weeds near the car, and Jumpin' found a man. There was a peculiar odor in the air; something that smelled like some kind of a strong antiseptic.

Jumpin' scratched a match and examined this man, who was flat on his back in the weeds, trussed up with ropes. And in the flickering match-light, Jumpin' recognized his boss—Bud White.

Quickly he unfastened the ropes and helped Bud to his feet. The young cowboy was badly dazed, but recognized Jumpin'.

"Now, jist what in —— are you doin' here?" gasped Jumpin'.

Bud sat down on the overturned hand-car and stretched his sore muscles.

"What did we hit?" asked Bud vacantly. "I heard one of the men yell for the other to look out, and jumped. Then we crashed into something."

"That was us," explained Jumpin' "Me and Abel Strauss, Curley Steele and Smith. We was in the light wagon from the K8. Abel was takin' us all to the Bar S. We got drunk and the mule ran away and stopped on the car track.

"Now, I'd like to know where you came from, Bud?"

But before Bud could answer a man came slogging along through the brush and weeds. He stopped near them, as though wondering which way to go.

"Who in —— are you?" asked Jumpin'. The man started.

"I'm Smith," he croaked. "——, I'm a mess! I must 'a' fell into somethin'."

"C'mere, Smith."

Smith came over to them and Jumpin' scratched another match. Smith did not exaggerate when he said he was a mess. Some of his clothes had been torn from his body, and what remained was a gobby mess of flour and some sort of dark fluid, which did not smell like violets. It was the strange odor which Jumpin' had smelled before.

Bud began laughing. He hammered his heels on the hand-car and seemed to be enjoying it hugely. But not so with Smith. He swore angrily and walked away to the road which led to Meteor City and they heard his footsteps die away in the distance.

Then they heard Curley's voice, arguing with Smith, but were unable to hear what was said. Curley came on and Jumpin' called to him. He was rather amazed to find Bud White there.

It did not take Bud long to explain just why he made Vint Brawley eat the letter, and of his capture by two of Brawley's men.

"They stole a hand-car from the section house at Colton," said Bud. "They tied me up tight, packed me out there and loaded me on. They put a five-gallon can of sheep-dip on the car, and brought me all the way down here. The idea was to take me to Meteor City, tie me to a hitch-rack down there and soak me good with sheep-dip. Then they were going to put a sign on me, which read: 'Compliments of Vint Brawley to Bart McLeod.' That was Brawley's idea of gettin' even with me."

"And Julius ruined their game," choked Jumpin'. "We've got to erect a monument to that —— mule. But it's a wonder we wasn't all killed."

"Would have, if we'd been sober," grunted Curley. "I guess I chased one of Brawley's men half-way to Meteor. He shore could run. Let's all go back to town. Yore horse is there, ain't he, Bud?"

"Yeah—unless somebody took him to the ranch. But what became of Abel?"

"He's up there a ways," said Jumpin'. They walked back toward the crossing, when here came Abel on Julius, bulking big in the darkness. The tall mule limped badly. Abel drew up as they came close.

"I got mine mool," he explained sadly. "Limps he does in von leg. Unt dis iss all dere iss left from der vagon. I'll betcha my life I get fired from dis. Git oop, Chulius."

The mule started down the road. Jumpin' laughed chokingly and slapped a hand on his thigh.

"There ain't another man in the Smoky River Valley that can do it," he declared.

"Do what?" asked Bud.

"Take a wagon-wheel in each hand, and mount that tall mule. Why, that mule ain't even broke to ride."

"That mule," said Curley earnestly, "is broke to everything, except balking. I'll betcha he won't even stop to eat from now on."

"It was sure some celebration," laughed Bud. "You boys saved me from an awful proposition. One thing I've got to do and that is to find out from Smith about that letter. Somebody lost it, and I think Smith knows who it was."

"It was Bart McLeod," said Jumpin'. "He came back lookin' for it, after you left for Colton."

"And he asked me where yuh went," added Curley. "He knows yuh went away on that cattle train, Bud."

"Good gosh!" exploded Bud. "It looks as though I'm sunk."

"I THOUGHT maybe you'd bring Bud out to supper with you, Dad."

Bart McLeod tossed his hat aside and sat down in one of the many comfortable chairs on the Circle M ranch-house porch. He looked old and weary, as he sat there, his big hands on his knees, his lips compressed, wondering just what to tell Mazie, who stood in the doorway behind him.

"I couldn't bring him with me," he said finally.

"Couldn't? Oh, I see—he went home early."

"No," McLeod shook his head. "He didn't go home, Mazie; he went to Colton."

"Went to Colton? What in the world would he go to Colton for, Dad?"

McLeod turned slowly and looked at the girl. She had changed from her riding clothes and was wearing a pale blue dress; the color of moonlight in the hills. Her slim fingers played nervously with the turquoise necklace, which hung to her waist; blue jewels and hammered silver from the Navajo artists.

"You've got to know about it, Mazie," he told her softly. "It looks as though Bud White had sold out to the sheep-men—to Vint Brawley."

The girl's eyes opened in amazement, astonishment. She did not believe a word of it, but her tongue refused to function. She came closer to McLeod and put a hand on the back of his chair, staring down at his tense features.

"No—Dad," she whispered. "You can't mean—that."

"I wish to —— I didn't," he said hoarsely. "I trusted Bud. Today he got a letter from Vint Brawley, telling him his price was too high—and he's gone to Colton."

"A letter from Vint Brawley? Are you sure, Dad? Did he show it to you?"

"I opened it myself," said McLeod shamelessly. "It had Brawley's initials on the envelope; so I opened it."

"You opened Bud's letter, Dad?"

"I had to, Mazie. I couldn't take a chance. I can't trust anybody, it seems—and I need honest men now, if I ever did. If Bud would sell out—"

"Where is that letter, Dad?"

McLeod shook his head helplessly.

"I don't know. I thought I put it in my pocket, but when I got away from town, I found only the envelope. I went back and searched, but couldn't find it."

"And somebody else will find it, Dad! Oh, what will they think of Bud? Everybody will know it now."

"Well," said McLeod flatly, "what's the difference? He played crooked with me. Brawley asked him to come to Colton and talk it over. And Brawley will do anything to get sheep into Smoky River Valley—anything. He's got money enough to buy my men. And when he bribed Bud he struck at the center of my defense—the Gateway. That's Brawley's stumbling-block."

"But isn't there a chance that you are mistaken?"

"How could I be? It was all in that letter."

"But Bud didn't see the letter, Dad," Mazie was clutching at every straw. "He didn't know Brawley wanted to see him."

McLeod laughed harshly.

"This ain't the first letter Bud's got from Brawley. They've worked it down to a point where they talk price. I reckon Bud wants too much money."

"It should be worth a lot of money—to sell your friends."

"To sell your friends," echoed McLeod softly. "That's what Bud is doing. He's selling his soul, Mazie. But," McLeod shut his eyes wearily, "it's his own soul. Brawley will pay him a lot of money, and he'll go away—a long ways away from Smoky River Valley, and try to enjoy it."

Mazie walked to the porch railing, clinging with one hand to a porch-post, looking off toward the V-shaped notch in the hills which marked the gateway to Smoky River Valley. It was barely visible in the evening light.

Mrs. McLeod came from the house, stopping just outside the doorway. She was a tall, gray-haired woman, about the same age as her husband; sweet-faced, her eyes hidden behind colored glasses.

"I heard what you said about Bud," she said softly. "It doesn't seem possible, Bartley."

"I know it don't," said McLeod. "But I had the proof. If any one had told me that Bud was a traitor, I'd never believe it. I'd stake my life on Bud's honesty, until I got that letter. I'm going to take Jud Hanley over to the Bar S after supper—to take Bud's place."

Jud Hanley had been foreman of the Circle M since McLeod had owned it; a slow-moving, dependable sort of a cowboy. Each of the three ranches, the K8, Circle M and the Double O had ranch-foremen, but Bud White, in addition to being ranch-foreman of the Bar S, was virtually in charge of all the ranches.

"You are giving Jud Hanley Bud's job, without even having a talk with Bud?" asked Maizie.

"Yes. Our talk will mean only one thing—and I want a reliable man in charge at the Gateway."

"But what would Vint Brawley want to buy Bud for?" asked Mrs. McLeod. "What has Bud to sell?"

McLeod laughed harshly.

"Plenty, my dear. Brawley knows he can't put sheep through the Gateway without help from this side. If he could buy Bud—well, he could put a hundred thousand sheep into the valley before we could find it out.

"Brawley is no fool. He beat me to the JAL ranch, in order to have a foothold in the valley. And he leased fifty thousand acres of grazing land; some of it on this side of the river.

"The Colton range is sheeped out. Brawley must move his sheep or sell them. He might find a range farther north, but it would cost a fortune to move his herds; so he'll do anything to force his way in here."

Came the soft, musical beat of a triangle, as the cook announced supper. McLeod heaved his huge bulk out of the chair and patted Mazie on the shoulder, as they walked into the house.

He realized that this was a blow to her. He did not know whether Bud had ever proposed to Mazie, but everyone seemed to understand that they were sweethearts. Jud Hanley came in from the rear of the house and took his place at the table. He was the only one of the cowboys who ate with the family.

"We'll ride over to the Bar S after supper, Jud," said McLeod. "You might as well pack up your stuff, because I'm putting you in charge over there."

Hanley looked up quickly and his eyes shifted from one to the other of the McLeod family, but none of them looked at him.

"All right," he said, realizing that something was wrong. But he asked no questions, although wondering what had happened to Bud.

They finished supper in silence, and Hanley went to the bunk-house to pack his belongings. The rest of the Circle M cowboys were still in Meteor City, probably celebrating the big shipment.

"We better ride to town before we go to the ranch," Hanley told McLeod, as he tied his war-bag on the saddle. "Most of the boys are down there, and they'll prob'ly have a wild night."

"I suppose," said McLeod wearily. He did not want to tell Hanley why he was putting him in charge of the Gateway ranch. They rode to town and saw Jumpin' Bean, Curley Steele, Abel Strauss and the Gem swamper, drinking together in the Gem. Two of the Circle M boys were playing poker. McLeod had nursed a secret hope that they might find Bud White there, but no one had seen him since dark.

It was eight miles out to the Gateway from Meteor City, and during the ride out there McLeod told Hanley why he was to take charge of the Bar S.

"Don't believe a —— word of it!" snorted Hanley. "Don't care if you did read the letter. Bud ain't that kind."

"Money will buy almost any man, Jud," declared McLeod. "It was more than Bud could stand, I suppose. He'll show up tomorrow mornin'—maybe—and when he does, don't let him on the ranch. If he wants to know why, send him to me and I'll tell him."

"You'll have to," replied Hanley. "I'll be hanged if I will."

"You'll not let him on the ranch, Jud."

"No, I'll go that far for yuh, McLeod. I'll chase him off the ranch, but I won't tell him why. He'll prob'ly know why."

"He ought to, Jud."

The Chinese cook was the only one at the ranch-house. He let them in, grinning widely.

"Bud White here?" asked McLeod, still hopeful.

"Not home. Boy all gone."

"All right, Charley." McLeod walked across the room to a little telephone and spun the handle. Almost immediately a voice answered; the voice of "Silent" Knight, keeper of the little lookout beside the cliff.

"Hello, Knight; this is McLeod. Is everything all right?"

"Everything all right, Mr. McLeod."

"That's good, Knight. Jud Hanley will be in charge of the Bar S for a while, beginning tonight."

"Oh, all right," answered the old man. "I'll see him in the mornin'."

McLeod hung up the receiver and turned to Hanley.

"You can trust Knight, Jud. As long as you're in charge, I'll have to tell you something. But maybe I better show it to you first."

They walked out the rear door, circled the stable and came out near the wire fence. It was light enough to see the outline of the fence.

"Out beyond the fence that slope narrows down to about seventy-five feet, Jud," explained McLeod. "It is sort of a bluff, kinda hanging toward the river. Beyond that is room for plenty of stock to pass between the breaks and the river. But to come out past here they've got to cross that seventy-five foot shelf."

"And they'd have to tear down that fence, too," observed Hanley.

"The fence is only a bluff," stated McLeod. "Two men with wire nippers could open it up in a few minutes. No, I've never figured on stopping Brawley at that fence. But I've got a place where I can stop him, Jud.

"Up in that little shack against the cliff is old man Knight, who, at one time, was a dynamite man on railroad construction work. We know that there is no danger from sheep at night; so the old man spends his days up there in the tower, as he calls it, watching the river cañon.

"He's got some wires running up to the tower, and they extend out beyond the fence. At the end of those wires, buried about twenty feet under the ground, is enough dynamite to kick that bluff into the river. It is only a last resort, Jud. I had an idea of shooting it off and blocking forever any chance of invasion from the North; but I don't know what kind of a damage suit I'd have, if I blocked the river, and there's always a chance that this whole Bar S ranch might decide to toboggan off into the Smoky."

"How many men know about this?" asked Jud.

"Bean, Knight, Bud White, you and me. Only five men, Jud. It'll probably be great news to Vint Brawley, when Bud tells him. We'll have to watch close from now on."

"I reckon so," nodded Jud. "If I was you I'd shoot that danged bluff off into the river and thumb my nose at Vint Brawley. He'll catch yuh nappin' one of these days."

"No, I don't believe it. From the tower we can spot sheep for ten miles, Jud. You can depend on old man Knight, to see anything that moves North of here."

When McLeod went back home he took an old road, which led past the K8 ranch, and this prevented him from meeting the four men with the mule.

Bud White, Jumpin' Bean and Curley Steele went back to Meteor City. They went to the Gem, looking for Smith, the swamper, but did not see him, because he was in the back room with Gil Brant and one of Brawley's men, who had helped man the hand-car.

Smith had come in, reeking with sheep-dip; came in the back door and found Gil Brant in conference.

"For —— sake, what happened to you?" asked Brant.

"I dunno," confessed Smith.

"Yo're all covered with dip!" snorted the sheep-man. "Was you in the smashup?"

"I s'pose," said Smith vaguely. "I dunno much about it."

"Did they find Bud White?" asked Brant.

Smith scratched his head thoughtfully.

"I dunno. It's all kinda blank to me. I remember somethin' about a train comin'. We started out in a wagon for the Bar S ranch, I remember that much."

The sheep-man had told Brant about the scheme to tie Bud White to a hitch-rack and dope him with sheep-dip, and it was easy to see that Smith had received most of the dip when the smash came.

"Before you wash up, I want you to answer a question."

"What is it?" asked Smith.

"You gave Bud White a letter today. What was in it, Smith?"

"Oh, yeah. I found it, Brant. It was to Bud White from Vint Brawley, offerin' to talk it over with Bud. Brawley told him his price was too high. That's why I asked Doc Ellis if Bud White was one of us. It made White awful sore. I think somebody else must have opened the letter, because I'm sure White never seen it before."

"That's the letter Bud White made Vint Brawley eat," declared the sheep-man. "Made him chaw it up and swaller all of it."

Brant grinned widely.

"I'll bet it tasted bad to Vint."

"Made him mad as ——. I thought he was goin' to kill White. But he thought that this scheme would be better, and it would have been, except for a lot of drunks and a mule. One of them chased me about half-a-mile, callin' me Smith."

"Thought it was me," said Smith. "My ——, I'm a mess."

"You better burn those clothes," advised Brant. "This is a cow country, and they'd kill a man who smelled like you do."

"I may smell bad," said Smith, "but I've got an idea for Brawley to work on."

"Let's have it," said Brant quickly.

"Nope." Smith shook his head. "I'll tell it to Brawley. I've got some business to attend to at Oro Madre, and I'll see Brawley on my way up there."

Brant looked queerly at Smith.

"When are you going?"

"Oh, in a couple of days."

Brant knew that Smith had reference to that letter from the doctor at Oro Madre, and that he intended taking Nellie up there with him. After Smith went out Brant advised the sheep-man to keep under cover until the early passenger train went through to Colton, and went out to the gambling room.

Nellie had just finished a song and was leaving the platform. She flashed a smile at Brant, who made up his mind suddenly. He came up to her, smiling.

"How is the little song-bird tonight?" he asked.

"Fine, Gil. Awful small crowd tonight. Did you like my new song?"

"I sure did," lied Brant. "Great stuff."

The girl smiled and started past him, but he touched her on the arm and she turned.

"Nell," he said softly, "I want to ask you something?"

"Ask me something? Go ahead."

Brant glanced toward the front of the room. Doc Ellis was standing at the bar, taking a drink, watching them. Brant turned to the girl and said:

"Nell, will you marry me?"

"Marry you?" The girl frowned, as though she did not understand. It was unusual for a dance-hall girl to get an offer of marriage from a sober man.

"Would that be so awful?" asked Brant earnestly.

"Well," she started to laugh, but checked herself. She took hold of Brant's sleeve and looked him square in the eyes.

"I don't understand, Gil. What's the big idea?"

"Maybe I love you," he said softly.

"And maybe you don't, Gil. Did you ever stop to consider who I am?"

The words of Doc Ellis came back to him, and he laughed.

"Am I better than you are, Nellie?"

She turned away and when she looked back at him her eyes were full of tears.

"It's awful funny, Gil," she said. "Doc Ellis asked me the same thing tonight."

"To marry him?" demanded Brant quickly.

She nodded

"And about him not being better than I am."

Brant laughed shortly and looked toward Ellis.

"What did you tell him?" he asked.

"I told him I'd give him my answer tomorrow night, Gil. I didn't know you felt the same about me, Gil."

"Didn't you, Nell? Will you give me your answer now?"

"No, not now, Gil. I can't. You see I promised Doc to wait and give him his answer tomorrow night, and it wouldn't be fair. Oh, this is too much, Gil. What's the matter with you and Doc Ellis, anyway?"

"I don't know," said Brant vacantly. "Maybe we both got bit by the same bug at the same time, Nell."

"I wonder," said Nellie thoughtfully, as she turned away and went to her room. She knew there was something behind all this; something besides love, and she wondered just what it was.

Brant sauntered over to the bar and moved in beside Doc Ellis. Doc gave him a sidewise glance, but did not speak until Brant said:

"Tried to beat me to it, eh, Doc?"

"Oh," said the little gambler softly. "She told you, eh?"

Brant nodded and motioned for the bartender to set out the drinks.

"I didn't know you asked her," said Brant.

"Until you asked her, eh?"

Brant laughed and filled his glass.

"I'm not losing any loose fortunes, if I can help it, Doc."

"What did she say?"

"No decision yet. I'll make you a proposition, Doc. No matter which one she takes, we split on the mine."

Doc Ellis drank thoughtfully and turned from the bar.

"That's all you want—that mine, Gil?"

"Well, what do you think?" laughed Brant.

"I didn't know, Gil. Maybe you never stopped to think that I might want the girl, even if there wasn't any mine."

"Well, for —— sake!" blurted Brant. "Doc, don't be a fool. That girl is just a dance-hall fluzie—common property."

"That'll be about all, Gil." The little gambler's face went white, and the smile disappeared from Brant's face. He knew Doc Ellis for a dangerous man to antagonize.

"I beg your pardon, Doc," he said seriously. "I didn't know how you felt."

But as the gambler walked away Brant looked at him, a sarcastic smile on his lips. Brant felt that Ellis didn't have a ghost of a chance against him, and down in his heart he felt sorry for Ellis, who was sincere.

* * *

SMITH managed to scrub most of the sheep-dip off his body, changed clothes and came back to the hall. Near the rear of the room he heard two dance-hall girls talking to each other, and their conversation, what he had heard, made him curious.

It was evident that the girls knew of Ellis' and Brant's proposals of marriage to Nellie, and the girls were having a lot of fun, wondering what it was all about.

"Who told you about it, Sue?"

"Jen. She heard Doc propose to Nell. I heard Gil ask Nell to marry him. I was just behind him, close enough to hear most of it. What in —— is this place coming to?"

"I dunno. If I had my choice I'd take Doc. Gil is too good looking, and knows it. Doc ain't good lookin', but he's a square shooter."

Smith had heard enough to know that these men were proposing marriage to Nellie, in order to get control of the mine. It was a dirty deal, decided Smith. One of the girls had said that Doc Ellis was a square shooter. And this might mean that Gil Brant was not. Anyway, he had proved himself a crook, when he tried to steal that letter.

Smith went to the rear of the room, intending to wait for Nellie, and to tell her the whole story. But she was so long in making her appearance that Smith grew tired. He was still a trifle woozy from the liquor he had drank that day, and wanted to go to bed.

He went out into the street and found Doc Ellis on the saloon porch. The little gambler eyed him closely, but did not speak.

"I want to talk to you, Ellis," said Smith. The gambler tossed his cigaret away and leaned a shoulder against a post.

"You knew about the letter that Brant stole," said Smith. "The letter that was addressed to me. Prob'ly yuh know I got it back, don't yuh?"

"Well?" said Ellis softly, wondering what was coming next.

"That's why you and Brant want to marry Nellie, ain't it?"

"What do you know about that, Smith?"

"Never mind—I know about it. Which one is she goin' to take?"

Ellis shook his head slowly.

"I don't know."

"Uh-huh. Don'tcha think that's a dirty deal, Ellis? Marryin' a girl to get some money?"

"—— you, it's none of your business, Smith!" hotly. "You mind your own business. I don't know whether she's got any money coming or not—and I don't care."

"Yuh don't? Uh-huh. That's different."

"How does Brant feel about it?" asked Smith, when Ellis made no further comment.

"You might ask him, Smith."

"No, I don't reckon I will. Yuh see, he was the one that took my letter. But you ain't got much chance against Brant."

"Maybe not," said Ellis flatly.

Smith moved in closer to Ellis and put a hand on the little gambler's shoulder.

"Ellis, I heard a girl say you was on the square. Are yuh?"

"I hope so, Smith."

"Uh-huh. Well, I'm goin' to bed. Good luck."

Smith walked back through the saloon and into his little bed-room, which was furnished him by the Gem. He lighted a lamp, locked the door and sat down at a little table, where he took out the letter from the doctor at Oro Madre and studied it a long time. Then he placed it on the table in front of him, picked up a sheet of paper and began writing.

IT WAS early the following morning when Bud White and Jumpin' Bean rode in to Meteor City and tied their horses at the Gem hitch-racks. Neither of them had slept. Jud Hanley had told Bud what McLeod had said about not letting him on the Bar S. It meant that Bud White was fired from the employ of McLeod; so Jumpin' Bean handed his verbal resignation to Hanley, and rode away with Bud.

"You hadn't ought to quit on my account," said Bud, as they dismounted. It was possibly the twentieth time he had told Jumpin' Bean the same thing, and had received the same answer—

"I'm old enough to do as I —— please, Bud."

Swampers were busily engaged in cleaning out the Gem; so Bud and Jumpin' halted just outside the doorway. Smith was near the doorway, sweeping out an accumulation of playing-cards, cigaret butts, sawdust; while other swampers were sloshing the floor with buckets of water.

And as the two cowboys waited for the finish of the deluge, Gil Brant and two other men came to the doorway from the vicinity of the bar and halted near the door.

"You've just about got time to catch that train," said Brant. "Tell Brawley that there is nothing new."

"He probably won't listen for a while," laughed one of the men. "Wait till we tell him what happened last night. Anyway, we're much obliged for the beds, Brant."

"I'm wonderin' if we hadn't better go out the back way," said the other man. "Yuh never can tell who might see us."

"That might be a good scheme," agreed Brant, and they went toward the back of the room.

Bud squinted sidewise at Jumpin'. This was the first intimation that Gil Brant was in with Brawley.

"Those were the two men who brought me in on the hand-car," said Bud softly.

"Fine!" grunted Jumpin'. "Let's meet 'em at the depot and knock —— out of 'em, Bud. We've got time. Why, the train ain't even whistled yet. C' mon."

But Bud shook his head and led Jumpin' away from the vicinity of the doorway.

"Let 'em go," he said. "They wasn't to blame, Jumpin'. They work for Brawley. And it's worth lettin' 'em go to find out that Gil Brant is workin' for Brawley. And I'll bet that Smith is also workin' for Brawley. —— him, he's the whippoorwill who gave me that letter!"

"And yo're fired and I quit," said Jumpin' dismally.

They ate breakfast in a restaurant and rode out of town, heading toward the Circle M. Bud wanted to explain to McLeod, and try to make him understand the truth of the matter.

Smith, the swamper, watched them ride away, and a few minutes later he met Gil Brant.

"When you was talkin' to them two men

from Brawley, over by the front door, Bud White and that homely cowpuncher from the Bar S, the one they call Jumpin', were just outside the door," informed Smith.

"They prob'ly heard everythin' yuh said."

Brant scowled heavily. "Are you sure of that, Smith?"

"Yeah. They came to the door, but stepped aside as I swept out some stuff. You came along about that time, and I left that job until you got through talkin'."

Brant swore softly and walked to the door, looking up and down the street.

"They rode away a few minutes ago," said Smith. "They took the road toward the Circle M."

"They've gone to tell McLeod," surmised Brant." —— the luck! Now they'll all know that we're with Brawley." Brant paced the length of the bar, scowling thoughtfully. Then—

"Smith, you said last night that you had a scheme. What is it? If we're going to be of any use to Brawley, we've got to work fast. Unless I'm mistaken, McLeod and his punchers will wipe this place off the map, if he's convinced that Brawley owns it. What's your scheme?"

Smith shook his head.

"I'll tell it to Brawley. There's an evenin' train for Colton, and I'll take the trip."

"Tell it to me, Smith."

But Smith refused. He walked out of the saloon and crossed the street to the post-office. Brant watched him gloomily. He wondered what McLeod would do when he found out that White already knew about the Gem. Smith came from the post-office, carrying several letters, one of which he was reading, as he crossed the street.

"Another letter from Oro Madre," decided Brant. Smith put it in his pocket as he came in and handed the rest of the mail to Brant.

"Happened to be over there, so I brought it all," he said, and went back in the room, where he sat down at a table and reread his letter. Brant sorted the mail quickly and passed it to the bartender, who usually handed it out to the employees.

BRANT wanted to see Smith's letter; so he sauntered back to where Smith was sitting, but Smith pocketed the letter.

"Are you sure those two cowboys heard what was said," asked Brant, opening the conversation.

"Sure they did," nodded Smith. "They heard what was said, and sneaked away. Mebby they thought I didn't know they were there, and they're goin' to surprize us."

"That's what I'm afraid of, Smith. I've got a notion to wire Brawley and have him come down here on the night train. He'll want to know about this."

"That might be a good idea," agreed Smith. "I thought I'd have to go to Oro Madre, but that's all off now; so I'd rather have Brawley come down here."

"You say it's all off?" queried Brant, trying to make his voice sound indifferent.

Smith nodded and leaned across the table.

"Brant, we don't have to make believe. I know you stole that letter from me, and I know what yore game was. But we both lose."

"Both lose? What do you mean."

"You know —— well what I mean. I was goin' to claim Nellie as my daughter and get half of that mine. You was goin' to beat me to it, wasn't yuh?"

"Was I?" Brant grinned slowly. "Well, suppose I was."

"Well, go ahead—I'm through."

"Through? What do you mean, Smith?"

"Go ahead—I won't try to stop yuh, Brant."

"You talk like a —— fool. What's the game?"

"There ain't none; the game's busted. Read this."

Smith drew out the letter and passed it over to Brant. It read:

> MY DEAR MR. SMITH: Not having had any reply to my letter, sent you at Meteor City, I am writing you again, but this time there is a different story to tell.
>
> There has been considerable discussion over the advisability of turning such a valuable property over to this lady, on the mere say-so of a stranger, and it seems that there might be some legal tangle. Since writing you a committee of the mining men have investigated the property in question, and discovered that Paw-Paw Jones' final blasts ripped out the last of the vein.
>
> It was evidently only a stringer, as the face of the drift, beyond the end of the vein, shows a different character of rock. Paw-Paw Jones died without any knowledge of this, and as the prospect now stands, it is only worth the amount of ore already on the dump—which is not enough to make it worth while. Would like to have you come and verify this letter, as I can only take the report of the committee.
>
> Very truly yours,
>
> (Signed) M. L. DUNHAM, M.D.

Brant looked up from the letter, squinting thoughtfully. It was more of a blow than Smith realized, but Brant was too much of a gambler to show he had been hit hard.

"Another bubble," he said slowly, handing the letter back to Smith, who put it in his pocket. "You didn't say anything to Nellie about this, did you, Smith?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, it's no use now." Brant got to his feet. "I'm going to wire Brawley to come here tonight."

Smith nodded, and went back to his work. He was still a little sore over their escapade of the night before. He had landed on his back in the dirt, while over him spewed a can of the despised sheep-dip. His body still smelled of it, and he doubted if he would ever get it out of his clothes. And the worst of it was, he had found out nothing from the cowboys. He decided that as a detective he was a fairly good swamper.

It did not take Bud and Jumpin' long to cover the four miles out to the Circle M, where they found the McLeod family at breakfast. The two cowboys sat down on the porch and waited until breakfast was over, when Bart McLeod joined them.

"Hanley explained some of it to me last night," said Bud, opening the conversation. "He gave me to understand that I was to not come on the Bar S; so I'm here to find out more than he was able to tell me."

"And I quit," declared Jumpin' belligerently. "By ——, I'm with Bud from the line-camp to the slaughter-house."

"Quitting', eh?" said McLeod bitterly. He realized that Bean would mean a distinct loss to his forces.

"Yuh —— right," growled Bean. "You fire Bud—I quit. Nothin' fairer than that, is there?"

"That's hardly fair to me, Bean."

"Then you shoot square with Bud."

"I shoot square with men who shoot square with me. Bud got a letter from Brawley, and he went to see Brawley last night."

Bud laughed shortly.

"You don't deny it, do you?" demanded McLeod.

"I do not," said Bud flatly.

"Fair enough. If you'll wait a few minutes I'll make yuh both out a check for what you've got comin'." McLeod turned and went back into the house.

Mazie brushed past her father, as he went through the doorway, and he started to prevent her, but thought better of it, and she walked out to Bud.

"A-a-aw, for ——'s sake!" breathed Jumpin'. He got to his feet and walked out to the horses. Mazie and Bud looked at each other and Bud smiled crookedly.

"Hello, Mazie," he said softly.

"Bud, what have you done?" she asked tensely.

Bud shook his head.

"Nothin' wrong, Mazie."

"Honest, Bud? You're not throwing Dad down?"

"Yuh couldn't expect me to do that, could yuh?"

"Well, why don't you explain it to him, Bud?"

"I can't prove nothin'. I did get a letter from Brawley, and I went to see him last night. Yore father opened the letter and read it, Mazie. It was for me—not him. Then he lost the letter and a man found it. Last night I made Vint Brawley admit that he wrote it to me, tryin' to put me in bad. He'd do anythin' to bust up the McLeod organization. So I made him eat that letter. He swallered every bit of it.

"Two of Brawley's men captured me, and Brawley had 'em rope me up, put me on a hand-car and bring me to Meteor City. They were goin' to tie me to a hitch-rack on the main street and soak me with sheep-dip, to pay me for makin' him eat that letter. But Jumpin', Curley and a fellow named Smith, got drunk with Abel Strauss, and they all went ridin' behind a K8 mule, which balked in the middle of the railroad track, and the hand-car smashed into 'em.

"There wasn't anybody hurt, but the wagon was smashed and the hand-car wrecked. The boys found me and cut off the ropes. And that," grinned Bud," is how I went to see Brawley and got free transportation home again."

"For goodness sake!" gasped Mazie. "You went right up to Colton and faced Vint Brawley—and came home alive?"

"Well, I'm alive," smiled Bud. "Brawley acted pretty square, under the circumstances. That letter was awful hard to swaller."

"But why don't you explain that to Dad?" eagerly. "That clears up the whole situation."

Bud shook his head.

"He wouldn't believe it."

"Why wouldn't I? Because I don't think you had that letter when you got on that train." McLeod had come to the doorway and heard part of Bud's explanation.

"I had it all right," smiled Bud.

"Who gave it to you?"

"A swamper in the Gem—a feller named Smith."

"Smith, eh?" McLeod squinted narrowly. "Jim Smith?"

"I think so. He's a new man."

"Yeah. He was with me on that Oro Madre stage, the night I was held up, and I've got a hunch he got the dummy package. I think he's one of Brawley's men."

"So is Gil Brant," said Bud. "And I'll bet that every man in the Gem is workin' for Brawley. I heard Brant talkin' with the two men who brought me in on the handcar, and their conversation sure marked Gil Brant as a Brawley man."

McLeod shook his head wearily, as he stepped out to Bud, holding out his hand.

"I'm sorry I mistrusted you, Bud," he said. "It sure hurt me a lot, young man."

"It kinda hurt me, too," grinned Bud, as they shook hands. He turned and called to Jumpin', who was squatting beside the horses, smoking a cigaret—

"Yo're hired again, Jumpin'."

"All right," said Jumpin' indifferently. "Saves me the job of huntin' for another place."

"What's our first move?" queried McLeod. "We've got to muzzle that Gem outfit. Buck Halliday is back; came yesterday. But we can't depend on much help from the sheriff's office."

"Not from Halliday." Bud shook his head. "He's too much of a friend to Gil Brant. Anyway, the sheriff can't do anythin'. His hands are tied on this proposition, until it comes down to shootin' somebody. You give me and Jumpin' our checks, and mark 'em paid in full. We'll cash 'em at the Gem, and let it be known that you fired us."

"And don't let any of these limber-jawed punchers know any better," advised Jumpin', who had come up to the porch. "Brant don't know that we heard him and them two shepherds; so we might find out some more."

"All right," said McLeod dubiously. "We've got to do somethin' to smash Brawley. As long as we just keep him out, he'll always be a menace."

McLEOD gave them the checks and they went back to town. Brant sent the wire to Vint Brawley and came back to the Gem. It was nearly noon when some of the girls drifted down to the gambling room. Brant watched for Nellie to come. Doc Ellis was there, but ignored Brant, much to Brant's amusement.

Bud and Jumpin' came in and cashed their checks at the bar. Brant spoke pleasantly to them and offered to buy a drink. Brant wondered just how much they had heard of the conversation between him and Brawley's men.

"We're thinkin' of leavin' yuh, Brant," stated Bud, as they poured their drinks.

"What do you mean, White?"

"McLeod fired me, and Jumpin' quit." Bud squinted sadly at his glass. "Vint Brawley put me in bad with McLeod."

"How did that happen?" asked Brant, fully expecting that Bud would lie. But Bud did not lie at all. He gave Brant a short synopsis of his adventures in Colton the night before, part of which Brant already knew.

"Well, wouldn't McLeod believe your story?" he asked.

"Evidently not. But what's the difference? Plenty of jobs."

"That's true," mused Brant.

"We might get a job with Brawley—when he brings his sheep in here," thus Jumpin' gloomily. Brant gave him a quick glance, but the homely face of Jumpin' Bean was serious.

Gil Brant was no fool. He knew that Vint Brawley would give much to have these two cowboys on his pay-roll, but there was always a danger that they were not what they seemed. Even if McLeod had fired them, they were still cowpunchers—still haters of sheep.

"Well, he'll have a tough time gettin' in here," said Bud.

"He probably realizes it," smiled Brant. Nellie had made her appearance at the rear of the room, and Brant left the two cowboys to go back to her. Doc Ellis was standing beside a card table, where two men were playing seven-up, and now he watched Brant join Nellie near the orchestra platform.

Bud and Jumpin' exchanged quick glances and watched the boss of the Gem. Bud noticed that several of the girls were also watching Brant and this singer.

"Hello, Nellie," smiled Brant. The girl looked up, smiling.

"Hello, Gil."

Brant laughed easily and stepped in closer.

"Nell, I didn't exactly mean what I said last night. You knew I was kidding you, didn't you?"

Nellie stared at him blankly.

"What was that, Gil?"

"Why when I asked you to marry me."

"Oh!" She looked steadily at him, a ghost of a smile on her painted lips. "You were kidding me, Gil?"

"Sure. You're a good kid, Nell. I just wanted to make Doc jealous."

"And you were kidding me, were you, Gil?" Her voice was low pitched, a trifle husky.

"Yes. It sure hit Doc hard, kid, when I told him you'd give me an answer tonight." Brant laughed at his huge joke.

"Then I don't have to give you an answer tonight, Gil. It saves me the trouble of waiting until tonight to tell you what a dirty tin-horn card-sharp you really are, doesn't it?"

"Eh?" Brant flushed angrily. Nellie had lifted her voice enough so that every one in the vicinity could hear.

"You couldn't marry outside your class, Gil; and no dance-hall girl would marry you, if she knew you. My answer is the same as it would have been tonight, and—"

But before she could finish her sentence, Brant slapped her across the face, knocking her back against the orchestra platform, where she sagged to the floor.

For a moment the room went silent. Nearly every one in the place had seen it. Brant whirled, his face flushed with anger, both hands shoved in the pockets of his coat. Doc Ellis stepped away from the card-table, his right hand hidden under the breast of his coat.

"You dirty pup!" the little gambler's voice was pitched high, tense as a fiddle-string. His right hand flashed into view, holding a six-shooter.

Came the muffled thud of a shot. Doc Ellis jerked back and his gun-hand lowered. He seemed to be trying to lift it, as if it weighed many pounds. Another muffled shot. Ellis' gun fell, and he turned, grasping at the table, as he sprawled to the floor.

Smoke was issuing from Brant's right-hand coat pocket. He drew out his hand, holding a gun, and flung off the coat. It lay on the floor, sending up a spiral of smoke.

"You'll all notice I shot in self-defense," said Brant coldly, glancing from face to face. Nellie got to her feet, a smear of blood across her face, and went toward the prone figure of the little gambler.

"Come back here!" snapped Brant.

"Let her alone," said Bud grimly. He stepped away from the bar, his right hand splayed out over the butt of his holstered gun— "Just try to stop her, Brant," he said slowly.

Brant looked at the big cowboy, a trace of a sneer on his lips. Brant had the best of it—a gun in his hand. But something told him to wait. He knew Bud was waiting for him to move.

"Are yuh still hankerin' to shoot in self-defense?" asked Bud.

"I've got no quarrel with you, White."

"Then put up that gun."

Brant tossed it aside and came toward where the gambler was lying. Smith, the swamper, was pouring a bucket of water on the burning coat. The men at the card-table turned Doc Ellis over. He was conscious, trying to smile up at the girl, who wiped the blood off her face with the back of her hand, her eyes filled with tears. Some one ran out, hunting for a doctor.

"It's all right," whispered Doc. "He fooled me—he didn't pull his gun, Nellie."

"Oh, Doc!" gasped the girl. "Are you hurt bad? They're getting a doctor."

The little gambler, breathing heavily, tried to smile. He was game. Jumpin' took off his coat and placed it under Ellis' head. The gambler whispered his thanks, but did not take his eyes off the girl. Brant turned and walked back to his room, picking up his gun as he went.

Smith, the swamper, shoved two of the men aside and knelt down beside the wounded man, and the gambler's eyes shifted to him.

"Doc, it was my fault," said Smith. "I was tryin' to make it easier for you. I knew that all Brant wanted her for was to get that mine; so I wrote a letter to myself, saying that the mine was no good. I knew Brant wouldn't want her—and you would, Doc."

No one in the crowd, except Doc Ellis and the swamper, knew what was meant. Ellis sighed deeply and whispered:

"Thank you, Smith. You're not to blame—you didn't know."

The doctor came bustling in, and the crowd moved back to give him a chance. Smith drew Nellie aside and tried to explain about the mine, but she was more interested in the doctor's report than on her inheritance.

But the doctor gave him little hope. Four men carried the little gambler down to the doctor's home, which was just at the outskirts, and behind them went Nellie. Some one had put Doc's gun back in the shoulder-holster, and his coat sagged open, showing the gun, as they carried him along.

And Smith, the swamper, cleaned up the blood, while the Gem went ahead as usual, except that there was no singer now, and the dealer's seat at the Black-Jack game was empty. Bud and Jumpin' left the Gem, feeling strangely depressed over the shooting.

"I reckon Brant was justified in shootin' Ellis," said Bud. "But he wasn't justified in hittin' that girl."

"He sure wasn't," agreed Jumpin' heartily. "I was watchin' the face of that girl, while the doctor was examinin' Doc; and if Doc dies—" Jumpin's pause was expressive. "I wish I knowed what that swamper meant about that mine."

"I dunno," sighed Bud. "I reckon I better watch Mr. Brant myself. He didn't take kindly to me buttin' in thataway."

AND Bud was right. Brant was in an evil frame of mind. He sat in his private room and drank from a bottle. He had liked Doc Ellis. They had been together quite a while. But the girl had angered him, and he had struck her before he realized what he was doing. He would have to explain it all to Brawley. Well, he decided, it was none of Brawley's business, at least.

He suddenly conceived a great dislike for Smith, the swamper. Everything had been all right until Smith came. He had a good notion to go out and tell McLeod that Sylvester was in Meteor. That would be a good joke, he decided.

Then he changed his mind and wondered how it would be to go out and tell Bud White what he thought of him. That would be a good joke. He looked at his watch, squinting one eye at the dial. In two hours Brawley would be there, and he did not want Brawley to find him drunk; so he put the bottle on the table and stretched out on the bed.

And in the meantime the doctor tried to dig the bullets out of Doc Ellis, while Nellie sat, stony-faced, in a chair near the bed.

"I wish you'd go away," said the doctor kindly. The girl shook her head slowly. "I've got to stay, Doctor. He got shot on my account. And, anyway, I've no place to go."

"Go back to the Gem."

"No, I'll never go back there."

"What will you do?"

She shook her head dumbly.

"Somewhere, I suppose."

"I see. I'm afraid there's no hope for this man. I'm sorry."

"So am I, Doctor," wearily. "He's about the only friend I ever had, I guess."

The doctor ceased probing, and sat down beside the bed, after bandaging the wounds. The sun was going down now, and a cool breeze wafted the curtains. A little later the doctor lighted a lamp.

"He isn't suffering," said the doctor. But the girl said nothing. From far away came the sound of a locomotive whistle. The doctor glanced at his watch. The passenger from the North was on time.

Vint Brawley alighted from the rear coach and walked past the little depot, keeping out of the light. He was on dangerous ground. The report of his two men, who had stolen the hand-car, had not pleased him at all, but he realized that it had not been their fault. He felt that he still owed Bud White some misery.

He kept off the main street and approached the Gem from the rear, walking in on Brant unannounced. But Brant was not caught napping. He had slept off his drunk, mingled for a while with the people in the gambling room, and was in good shape.

He locked the door behind Brawley, drew the curtain over the window, and they sat down together.

"I shot Doc Ellis today," said Brant.

The big sheep-man ran a gnarled hand through his mop of gray hair, as he looked speculatively at Brant.

"Yuh did, eh?" Doc Ellis. Kill him?"

"No. Pretty bad shape, I guess. It was self-defense."

"Naturally. But why?"

"Oh, one of the girls got fresh and I slapped her face. Doc was stuck on her; so he started gunning for me."

"Yeah? Was that what you wanted me down here for, Gil?"

"No. I've heard all about the proposition between you and Bud White. Smith, the swamper, tells me that Bud White heard me talking with your two men this morning. It was so early in the morning that I—"

"You mean that White heard enough to make him think that you were with me, Brant?"

"Smith says they must have heard us," nodded Brant. "But Brant and Bean cashed their checks over the bar today, and they said that McLeod had fired them. You see, McLeod knew you wrote to White. Just how much White heard, I don't know, but he probably heard enough to make him suspicious."

"That's a —— of a note," growled Brawley.

"Of course, Brant being fired from McLeod's employ, he may not tell McLeod what he knows."

"The —— he won't! You don't know White. He's already told McLeod—even if McLeod fired him. White is a cowpuncher, and he hates me. This is goin' to make it bad for us, Brant, because the cattlemen will be suspicious. We've got to speed things up right away."

"That's one reason I wired you, Brawley. Smith says he's got a scheme. Wait a minute."

Brant left the room and came back in a few minutes with Smith, the swamper. Brawley shook hands with him and they sat down.

"Brant tells me you've got a scheme," said Brawley. The swamper nodded slowly.

"Yeah, I've got a scheme, Brawley. Mebby it's one you've already thought about."

Lowering his voice Smith outlined his idea of a good scheme to bring sheep into Smoky River Valley. Brawley listened closely, running his big hands through his hair, his deep-set eyes half-closed. Brant listened indifferently, his eyes upon Smith, his lips twisted in a cynical sneer.

Brawley nodded at the finish of Smith's scheme, and he rested his chin on one of his big hands, hunched in his chair. He might have posed as one of the old prophets, contemplating the sins of mankind; the yellow light accentuating the natural old-ivory tint of his skin, the deep shadows of his eyepits.

"It can be done," he said, after a long silence. "Three days from now. I can put that train in here at four o'clock. I can rush the herds to within six miles of the Gateway, without bein' seen.

"But there's another difficulty, Smith. When McLeod bought the Bar S ranch, he took almost a ton of dynamite out there. I know this to be a fact. They keep a man in that look-out against the cliff, and he may control this stuff. We've got to get him before he can act. You haven't met McLeod, have yuh?"

Smith shook his head savagely. "No, but by —— I will!"

"That's fine, Smith." He turned to Brant. "You get hold of Dan Gatton at the JAL, and tell him what to do."

"All right, Brawley. You bring in all the men you can, because this is going to be a lot of ——, even after the sheep are in the valley. McLeod won't give up without a battle."

"I know it. But once we get 'em in here, all —— can't drive us out. The law gives us an even break. We'll lose a few sheep and prob'ly a few men; but it's got to be done. Colton is all sheeped out—we've got to move—and I'm goin' to make Smoky Valley a sheep paradise."

Brawley got to his feet and looked at his watch.

"The passenger goin' north is due in ten minutes. I'll go back and start things goin'." He held out his hand to Smith.

"Much obliged, Smith. When this is over, I'll see that yo're taken care of. Good-by, Brant."

"I don't need takin' care of," said Smith coldly. "I'll take care of myself."

The big sheep-man laughed and turned to the door. He opened it, glanced around outside and slipped into the night. Smith turned toward the door which led to the gambling room, but Brant halted him.

"Sit down, Smith," he said. "I want to talk this over with you."

Smith turned back to his chair and sat down, wondering what there was to talk about. From outside they could hear the rattle of poker-chips, laughter, some one strumming on a guitar.

"What did yuh want to talk about?" asked Smith. Brant leaned forward in his chair, his lips tightly shut, as he considered the thin-faced, oldish man, slouched in the chair in front of him.

"Smith," he said coldly, "why did you lie to me?"

"Lie to yuh?" Smith straightened slightly, staring at Brant.

"Yes—lie to me." Brant barely moved his thin lips. "You —— old snake, you! That letter, I mean; the one about that mine being a failure. They told me about it out there." He barely moved his head, indicating the gambling room.

"Yeah?" Smith, the swamper blinked.

"You lied," repeated Brant softly. "You killed Doc Ellis."

"You lied!" retorted Smith. "You not only lied, but you stole from me, Brant. You stole that letter—the first one. Then you knew there was only one way to get possession of that mine, and that was to marry Nellie.

"You asked her to marry you, Brant." Smith leaned forward, pointing a lean finger at Brant. "But yuh wasn't square. Doc Ellis wanted her, and you knew it. Doc was on the square. I did write that letter, because I didn't want yuh to marry her."

"Is that so?" Brant laughed evilly. "You think Nellie is your daughter, don't you?"

"I don't know." Smith's voice was filled with bitterness. "She won't listen to me, Brant; she thinks I'm crazy. Somebody told her I claimed every woman I met as my daughter. I wonder if it was you."

Brant laughed with his lips.

"I don't know, Smith. But I do know you're crazy—crazy to do what you did to me. Brawley's got the scheme he needed; so he don't need you any longer. I'm through with you. Now, —— you, I'll pay you for killing Doc Ellis."

Smith lurched out of his chair toward the door, but Brant blocked him, flinging him back against the wall.

"Stay there, you —— old liar!" he gritted, drawing a gun from his pocket.

"Don't do that, Brant," panted Smith. "They'll hang you if you shoot me. I haven't any gun. This isn't self-defense, Brant."

Brant laughed insanely, as he cocked the six-shooter.

"There's an extra gun in my pocket," he chuckled. "It'll be in your hand when they come in to see what the shooting was about. The sheriff is my friend. You better pray—if you believe in prayer. I'll tell 'em you drew first."

"No, you can't do that, Brant! Don't—don't—"

Brant lifted the gun, his teeth shut tightly, the muscles of his jaw bulging with the strain. Smith was so close that there was no chance of a miss.

The crashing report of a gun thundered in Smith's ears and he lurched sidewise, almost falling. He thought it was strange that he felt no pain. He staggered back against the wall, staring at Brant, whose eyes were shut, hunched forward, as though listening intently.

Then Brant fell forward on his face, still clutching the gun. Something thudded on the floor beside the bewildered Smith, who jerked back. It was a blued Colt six-shooter. Smith swept it up from the floor, staring around, still bewildered.

The window curtain billowed in a vagrant breeze. It was up far enough for a shot to have been fired beneath it. Smith turned toward the door, gun in hand, as several men flung the door open, and behind them came a babble of voices, wondering what had happened.

Bud White and Jumpin' Bean were among those first at the doorway, as was Dan Gatton, the foreman of the JAL. Smith did not speak, while the men examined Gil Brant.

"Dean center," said Bud. "Never knew what hit him."

"Gun in his hand, too," observed Jumping Bean dryly.

"Kinda looks as though he was all set to do somethin'," agreed Gatton. Behind them came the sheriff, elbowing his way in. He glanced at Smith, who had not moved, and knelt down beside Brent.

"He don't need a doctor," said Bud. The sheriff shook his head and got to his feet, staring at Smith.

"What happened?" demanded the sheriff.

"You can see it all," said Smith slowly. "This is one self-defense that Gil Brant didn't get away with."

The sheriff looked at the gun in Brant's right hand, around at the crowd of men, and nodded in agreement.

"Help me pack him out," he said. "It looks like an even break."

Smith, the swamper relaxed and pocketed the revolver, watching the men carry

Brant's body away. Then he got his bucket and mop to clean up the spot, paying no attention to those who stared at him.

One of the dance-hall girls halted him, as he shuffled away with his bucket, and said:

"We heard that Doc Ellis died about twenty minutes ago."

Smith nodded slowly.

"I thought he did."

Far to the north a locomotive whistle sounded. It was the north-bound passenger, whistling for the crossing where the handcar had hit the mule.

"She must have just made it," muttered Smith.

"What did you say?" asked the girl.

But Smith did not say.

No one questioned the fact that Gil Brant had been killed in self-defense. They all knew Brant was a killer. He had died with a cocked gun in his hand, which was enough evidence that Brant was set to do a little killing on his own hook. Circumstantial evidence, it is true, but enough to satisfy every one that the swamper had beaten Brant on the draw. The thing was so evident that the sheriff did not even hold an inquest. Had he analyzed the case, he would have discovered that Nellie was no longer at the Gem, and that Doc Ellis' six-shooter had disappeared.

"Muddy" Poole, the tall, thin, gray-mustached gambler, took charge of the Gem. None of them had received any orders from Brawley, and it seemed the reasonable thing for Poole to take charge. But the Gem was no longer the gay, care-free place it had been.

There was an undercurrent of something. Bud White noticed it, and remarked it to Jumpin' Bean.

"They're nervous," declared Bud. "Mebby the shootin' of Doc Ellis and Gil Brant had made 'em jumpy, but I don't think that's it. If I didn't think that gang was in with Brawley, I'd lay it to the two killings; but I've got a hunch that somethin' is due to break."

"Dan Gatton and his gang have been there quite a lot," observed Jumpin'. "And we know darned well they're workin' for Brawley."

ON THE second day after the killing of Brant, Bud White saw Smith, the swamper, ride away from the town with Gatton. It was late at night, but Bud saw them ride past the lights of the Gem, and he knew he could not be mistaken. Neither Bud nor Jumpin' had been at the Bar S since Hanley had told Bud he was to keep away.

They had spent much of their time at the Gem, trying to hear something that might be of interest.

"Smith is one of the gang," declared Bud, as he and Jumpin' stretched out on their bed at the hotel that night. "He got in with you and Curley and Abel that evenin', just to see what he could find out."

"Well," said Jumpin' dryly, "he found out that a —— mule is almost immovable. That son-of-a-gun is a spy for Brawley, and we was takin' him out to the Bar S for a visit."

"We all make mistakes," laughed Bud.

"Yeah, and you made yours when you didn't kill Brawley, when yuh had the chance."

The next forenoon Jack Ames and "Breezy" West drove in from the Bar S with a team and wagon after groceries. That left only Jud Hanley and Silent Knight at the Gateway, as Jack was the cook.

Bud and Jumpin' greeted them jovially, and they all repaired to the Gem. Ames and West both knew that Bud and Jumpin' were still on McLeod's pay-roll, but Bud cautioned them to say nothing in the Gem about it.

"I shore feel like a lightenin'-bug," declared Ames, an old chuck-wagon cook, who had followed the roundups in nearly every western state. "Ain't been loose f'r an age. Thirteen rattles and I feel like buzzin'. Gimme liquor, and don't apologize if it's old enough to vote."

"Seen McLeod lately?" queried West.

Bud shook his head.

"Me neither, Bud. He ain't been to the Bar S since Hanley has been boss up there. Mebby he'll go up there today."

And West was right. McLeod had been busy at the Circle M, but now he decided to ride out to the Gateway. Mazie asked him to take her along.

"Bud ain't there," he told her teasingly.

"Nor here," smiled Mazie. She sobered suddenly and said—

"I wish this trouble was all over, Dad. Bud is too reckless."

"I guess he can take care of himself, Mazie. I don't understand about those shootin' scrapes down in town. It looks as though Brawley's men were fighting among themselves. I want to get a good look at this man Smith, who killed Gil Brant. He's a bad one."

They saddled their horses and rode across the hills to the Gateway. It was a drowsy afternoon, and they let the horses take their own gaits. Most of their travel was across the higher ground, where they might look off across the Smoky River Valley; amethyst and pale green, backed by the blue of the main range. Down the center of the valley ran the twisting green line of the river.

"Beautiful valley," said Mazie, shading her eyes as they drew rein on the crest of a hill. "Dad, there isn't an unbeautiful thing out there. It's like a fairyland."

"There's the JAL, over across the river, Mazie."

"But that isn't any different than the rest. It's the people that spoil it."

"I reckon that's so," agreed McLeod.

They rode on to the Bar S ranch-house, where Jud Hanley greeted them from the porch. They tied their horses to the corral fence and sat down in the shade of the porch.

"I sent Ames and West to Meteor City after food," said Hanley. "They'll probably be gone all day. Ames hasn't been to town for ever two months, and he's generated quite a thirst, I suppose."

McLeod smiled. He knew that Ames would probably come home in the bottom of the wagon.

"How's Silent Knight?" he asked.

"Fine. Why, a grasshopper couldn't move up the river, without Knight seeing it. Do yuh know anythin' new?"

"Not a thing, Jud, except that we're pretty sure the Gem outfit are owned by Brawley. You heard about the two shootin' scrapes?"

"Yeah. I didn't know that Brawley had anythin' to do with the Gem, but I'm not surprised. It'll come to a showdown pretty soon. Brawley ain't the kind of a man to stand still. I'd shore hate to see sheep in old Smoky. They're spreadin' all over the old ranges.

"They ruin the range for cattle, and in a short time even the sheep can't range. What's it comin' to, I wonder? Jist a lot of naked country—worth nothin' to anybody? Dry farmers, I suppose."

"Every cent I own is tied up here, Hanley," said McLeod. "I tried to buy some minin' property up in the Oro Madre, but I couldn't buy reasonable. I know mines. At least the sheep can't ruin a mine."

"Still yo're pretty well fixed," observed Hanley.

"Do yuh think so?" McLeod smiled grimly. "It does look as though I was, Hanley. But the fact of the matter is—I'm only half-owner of all this stuff. It should be McLeod and company."

"Well, I dunno anythin' about that," Hanley rested his hands on his knees, squinting from under the brim of his wide Stetson.

From back up the cañon came the dull rumble of a train, as it rolled slowly around the sharp curves. It came in sight around the side of the cliff across the river, the engine exhaust intensified by the rocky walls.

Inside the living-room tinkled the little telephone bell. Hanley sprang to his feet and ran into the house.

He came out in a moment, halting at the edge of the little porch, looking intently at the train, which was partly obscured by the narrow cut.

"What was it?" asked McLeod.

"Knight says it's a train-load of sheep. By ——, that's what it is, McLeod! About twenty cars!"

The three of them stood on the porch, watching the stock cars rumble past—the first sheep to ever enter Smoky River Valley.

"What does it mean?" wondered McLeod. "Why should any one ship a train of sheep south? My ——, I wish I knew who owns 'em."

"Listen, McLeod!" Hanley grasped McLeod's sleeve. "What would prevent Brawley from shipping his sheep in and unloadin' at Double O sidin'? It would be a cinch."

"Double O sidin'?" McLeod whirled and stared at Hanley. The rumble of the train was dying away, as it headed down through the open hills.

"Yeah, Double O sidin'," repeated Hanley. "It would cost him a lot of money, but Brawley won't stop for that. There's nobody goin' to stop him from unloadin' down there—nobody to see him."

"That's right, Jud."

Hanley ran back in the house and twisted the handle of the telephone.

"Keep a close watch, Silent," he ordered. "We think the sheep are headin' for Double O sidin', and we've got to stop 'em."

He slammed up the receiver and ran out through the back door, heading for the stable. Knight's sharp eyes had detected the train of sheep-cars, but he did not see a man drop off the rear stock-car, falling flat on the ground, while the caboose went past. This man was Ben Tillman, one of Brawley's most trusted men, and the best rifle shot in the Colton country. He had a small blanket-roll with him, and as soon as the caboose disappeared around the curve he sat up, unrolled the blanket and took out a 30-30 caliber, take-down rifle, which he proceeded to assemble.

HANLEY took his horse to the front porch, and found Mazie and her father already mounted.

"We've got to have help, Jud," said McLeod jerkily. "If Brawley is goin' to unload at the Double O, he'll have plenty of men down there. You go straight through town. You might be lucky enough to find Bud and Jumpin', and possibly West and Ames.

"Mazie is going to cut across to the K8, and I'll head for the Circle M. We'll have enough men to wipe out that herd of sheep, even if we're too late to stop the unloadin'. The train is travelin' slowly, and they may have to stop at Meteor City. If they do—find out who owns the sheep."

"All right; let's go."

And without any more preliminaries the three riders spread out fan-wise as their horses lurched into a running gallop. Silent Knight came out of his shack, standing on the tiny step, shading his eyes with one hand, as he watched the three riders disappear over the sage-covered hills.

He lighted his pipe and leaned back against the doorway. Far down the valley he could see the smoke from the engine. He turned and looked to the north, hazy in the afternoon light. But there seemed to be more than haze. Was it a brush fire, or was it dust, he wondered?

Then came a sharp thudding sound; like the word "whap!" Silent Knight jerked back against the doorway, his pipe falling from between his teeth. From across the river came the snappy bark of a high-power cartridge.

Knight staggered drunkenly, reaching for the doorway. Came another thud of a striking bullet, the crack of the report. But Knight did not hear the report of this shot; he was falling forward, plunging off the little step, falling face-down on the steep slope, where he rolled like a log, until he crashed into a tangle of brush, where stood the three-foot stumps of several jack-pines. He seemed to wrap around these stumps and lie quiet.

Across the river, lying against the side of the rocky grade was Ben Tillman, a grim smile on his lips, as he levered out the second cartridge. He picked up the two empty brass tubes and cast them far out over the bank, where they fell into the river.

Then he took the rifle apart and flung it far out toward the center of the roaring river, watching the two parts flail off through the air and fall into the depths below. He wiped his hands on his thighs, took a big chew of tobacco, rolled up the blanket, slung it across his shoulder and tramped north. He had fulfilled his part of the work.

From his elevation he could see far up the cañon, where a gray flood seemed to fill the slope between the sharp breaks of the cliffs to the edge of the river bank. It was the gray flood of sheep from the north, like the dirty waters of the spring freshet, rolling, rippling, undulating as it came on. It was still a long ways from the Gateway, but near enough for Silent Knight to have recognized its import, if he hadn't been lying down there among the jack-pine stumps, his face turned toward the sky.

THINGS had worked out to Vint Brawley's satisfaction. He and six of his men had come to Meteor the night before, under cover of the darkness, and had gone to the JAL, where Gatton had secured plenty of mounts for their job next day. Smith, the swamper had met them there.

Brawley knew it would be a grim business, but he was determined to bring in the sheep. They had ridden early from the JAL, heading toward the Gateway, determined to assault the place, in the event that the sheep train did not draw the strength away from that point.

They had seen Ames and West go to Meteor, which seemed as though fate was playing into Brawley's hands. And they had seen McLeod and Mazie go to the ranch, just before the coming of the train. Brawley knew that Ben Tillman would be able to get off the slow-moving train without much chance of a mishap, but there was always a possibility that the keeper of the tower might not give Tillman a chance to demonstrate his uncanny ability with a rifle.

But Brawley had made up his mind to capture that Gateway ranch; so after McLeod and Mazie had reached the ranch, he divided his forces into three parts. Smith rode with Brawley and Gatton, circling to the left. Three riders worked in slowly toward the ranch-house, while four swung along the road, going toward the ranch from nearer the river.

Brawley's outfit reached a point, almost in a direct line between the Gateway and the K8, when the train passed the ranch. From the brushy crest of a hill, Brawley, Smith and Gatton watched the ranch, about a quarter of a mile away.

They saw the three riders leave the ranch, and one of them headed directly toward where the three men crouched in the brush.

"Headin' for the K8," growled Gatton. "What about him, Vint?"

"We'll stop him," said Brawley. "We don't want to take any chances. Get the horses."

They ran back to the horses and mounted, riding to the crest, where they might watch the rider. It was Mazie, taking the shortest cut toward the K8. Brawley was the first to see that it was a woman, and he swore angrily.

"That's prob'ly McLeod's daughter," said Gatton. "Shall we stop her, Vint?"

"Yo're —— right."

They spread out about twenty feet apart, working along the crest of the hill, and she rode almost into Brawley before she saw him. She tried to swerve her horse aside and ride around him, but he blocked her and she was forced to draw up.

"Who are you?" she demanded, panting heavily. The other two men rode in close to her.

"Where did you think you was goin', miss?" asked Brawley.

"That doesn't concern you," she retorted. "Move your horse and let me pass, please."

"Sweet chance," grinned Gatton insolently. He dismounted and took the reins away from her. "You do the ridin'—I'll guide," he told her, as he mounted his horse.

"You ain't goin' to be hurt none," smiled Brawley. "Anyway, yuh won't as long as yuh behave."

"You are Vint Brawley," said Mazie, turning to Brawley. "I'd know you from your description."

"Yeah, that's me, miss. I'm the boogy-boo man from Colton. You just behave, and I'll show yuh a lot of nice little sheep."

Mazie shut her teeth tightly and said nothing more. She wondered if her father and Jud Hanley had also been captured.

"Did you see the train-load of sheep?" asked Brawley. Now that his plan was assured he was inclined to boast about it.

"I was just givin' 'em a ride," he told her. "I dunno what that train crew will do with 'em, because there won't be a man down there to unload 'em. Mebby," he laughed shortly, "some of yore dad's men will see that they're taken care of, eh?"

But the girl refused to talk. They started back toward the ranch, with the foreman of the JAL leading Mazie's horse. Smith studied the girl closely, a grim smile on his lips. After twenty years he was going to get even with Bart McLeod. He rode in close beside her and she looked curiously at him.

"What was yore mother's name before she married McLeod?" he asked her. Both Gatton and Brawley looked curiously at him.

"My mother's name was Miller," she said evenly.

"Yeah?" Smith dropped back, shaking his head slowly. It was evident that McLeod had not married Mrs. Sylvester. Perhaps it would have been better for McLeod, if he had, thought Smith. They rode up to the main gate of the ranch, joining with the four men who had come in along the river.

"We missed the man who went down the road," said one of the men. "We didn't hardly know what to do about stoppin' him, and while we was makin' up our minds he got past."

"Did he see any of yuh?" asked Brawley quickly.

"Don't think so. He was sure ridin' like ——."

Brawley turned to Mazie.

"Miss, the game is in our hands, as you can see; so we want to know where that dynamite is planted."

"I don't know anything about dynamite," she said. Brawley shook his head. "Yuh might as well tell us."

Gatton and one of the men had climbed up the slope toward the tower, and now Gatton yelled back at Brawley:

"Here's old man Knight, Brawley. Everythin' is all right."

"Good work," grunted Brawley. "Even if there is dynamite buried around here, there's nobody to touch it off. Who's got the axes? Let's get busy on that fence. Smith, you and Lee Morse, take this girl in the house. Smith can watch her, and Lee can watch down the valley from the porch. Everybody get goin'."

Mazie walked beside Smith, while the tall, gangling cowboy from the JAL slouched along behind them, taking up his position on the porch. Mazie sat down beside the table, holding her chin on her hands, wondering what would happen next. She was not afraid of anything happening to her, as long as she did not try to interfere with Brawley's work.

"This is goin' to be a blow to yore dad," said Smith. He had halted just inside the doorway, squatting on his heels. Mazie lifted her head and looked at him.

"Yes," she said softly. "It will almost kill him."

"That's good. But almost ain't quite enough."

Mazie stared at him. She had never seen him before today.

"Would you want to kill him?" she asked dully.

"I reckon I would."

"He's a good man." Just at that time she could think of nothing better to say.

Smith laughed harshly and shifted his gun. Gatton had given him a belt and holster to carry Doc Ellis' gun.

"Here comes some more," called Lee Morse softly. Smith did not look out. He heard men's voices, talking, arguing, laughing. Then there were footsteps on the little porch, and Bart McLeod's huge bulk darkened the doorway. His hands were tied behind him, his shirt almost torn off his huge torso. It was evident that McLeod had put up a battle.

"Git over there and set down," ordered one of Brawley's sheep-men, who came in behind McLeod, carrying a rifle.

"They got you, did they, Mazie?" said McLeod huskily. "I made a fight out of it, but they shot my horse." He sat down heavily in a chair and scowled at the dusty carpet. Smith peered at him from beneath the brim of his hat, a grin of anticipation on his lips.

JUD HANLEY did not see the men who had debated too long over his capture. He rode the eight miles to Meteor City in less time than it had ever been ridden, beating the train by several minutes. His horse almost fell with him at the Gem hitch-rack, as he dismounted on the run, merely tossing the reins over the top-bar of the rack.

There were several men in front of the Gem, who had seen his rapid entry, and one of them asked him why he was in such a hurry, but he ignored the question and entered the saloon. He found Bud White, Jumpin' Bean, Jack Ames and Breezy West at the bar.

"Come on out!" panted Hanley. Bud was striding toward the door, almost before Hanley spoke, and behind him went the rest of the boys. Ames was unsteady on his feet, and struck his shoulder against the doorway, as he came out.

"A train-load of sheep," panted Hanley. "Must be here now."

"Train-load of sheep?" queried Bud wonderingly.

"We've got to find out whose sheep they are," said Jumpin'.

The five men hurried down the wooden sidewalk, heading for the depot, while Hanley explained about McLeod and Mazie going to warn the boys of the K8 and Circle M.

The sheep train had drawn in on the siding, evidently to allow another train to pass. Bud swung into the caboose, where the conductor sat, half-asleep, his feet stretched out on the long seat.

"Who owns these sheep?" asked Bud. The conductor squinted at Bud and shook his head.

"I don't know," he said sleepily.

"Where are they goin'?"

"Double O siding."

"From Colton, eh?"

"Yep. Anythin' more you'd like to know?" The conductor was rather hard-boiled.

"That's enough," said Bud. "Much obliged."

He herded the boys out ahead of him, and Ames fell off the steps. They lifted him back on his feet.

"It's ten miles to Double O sidin'," mused Bud.

"——, we can beat the train!" snapped Jumpin'. "We'll see that Brawley don't get far with these woolies. My ——, why didn't we bring our rifles. Brawley will have all the best of it."

"Brawley mush think we're lota foolsh," muttered Ames wisely.

Bud stared at Ames for a moment.

"That's the idea! Brawley knew we wasn't fools; knew we'd head for Double O sidin' to stop him from unloadin' these sheep. C'mon!"

Bud started on a run toward the livery-stable, where he and Jumpin' kept their horses.

"Wazzamatter?" demanded Ames, trying to keep up with them.

West was just as drunk as Ames, but carried it better.

"Git in the wagon, Jack!" he panted. "I'll drive her till the wheels run off."

They reached the hitch-rack and untied the team. Meteor City was alive to the fact that something was wrong. The crowd in the Gem came outside. Muddy Poole smiled, as he stood in the doorway, because he knew the boys had found out where the sheep were going.

But the smile was wiped off his lips, when he saw Bud and Jumpin' race their horses out of the livery-stable and come pounding up the street, heading north. Hanley swung from the hitch-rack and joined them in a mad dash toward the Gateway, while behind them came the Bar S wagon, with Breezy West throwing the whip into the horses, while Jack Ames, true to McLeod's prediction, rode in the bottom of the wagon.

"What makes yuh think we better go back to the Gateway?" asked Hanley, as they rode stirrup to stirrup, the three horses running at top speed.

"Brawley is no fool!" panted Bud. "He knew that train of sheep would draw everybody away from the Bar S."

"Silent Knight is still there," yelled Hanley. "They can't get past him, Bud."

"Let's hope to —— he is, Hanley!"

BART McLEOD paid no attention to Smith. They could hear the sheep-men cutting the wires from the guard fence. Mazie's eyes were full of tears, as she leaned toward McLeod.

"I think they killed Silent Knight," she said softly. McLeod lifted his head and looked at her.

"My ——! Poor old Silent! Who killed him, do yuh know?"

"He's up there on the side of the hill. They must have killed him before they brought me here."

A man came striding along the porch, ducked his head and came in. It was Vint Brawley, showing his yellow teeth in a loose lipped grin of triumph. McLeod stared at him and Brawley laughed aloud.

"Got yuh licked, eh?" chuckled Brawley. "Sorry I had to bring yuh back here, Mac, but I wanted yuh to be here when the sheep went through. It'll be worth lookin' at. Thousands of sheep, Mac. I'll have this —— valley spewin' over with sheep!'

He struck the table with a bony fist, his wide lips shut tightly.

"Yore —— cattle ranches won't be worth a penny. Not a penny—except as line-camps for sheep. Ha, ha, ha, ha! I'll buy yuh out right now, at the rate of a cent on the dollar. That's a fair deal, McLeod. And you'll never get a better offer."

"I'll make you eat that, just like Bud White made yuh eat the letter you sent him," said McLeod evenly. He was bluffing, but Brawley wasn't sure what McLeod had up his sleeve.

"Yuh will, eh?" Brawley spat angrily. The taste of that letter was still on his palate. "I reckon you can't do much. The law won't help yuh. There's no law against cuttin' a fence, as long as yuh repair it again. As far as the sheep are concerned, we've as much right in here as the cattle, and you know it. You had possession and could keep us out, but that's all past now." He turned to Smith.

"Yore scheme sure worked, Smith."

"Yore end of it has," said Smith huskily. "I hope you get as much satisfaction out of it as I do, Brawley."

"You'd sure have to go some to beat me," laughed Brawley. He turned back to McLeod.

"Yuh sure had us bluffed a long time, McLeod. We didn't *sabe* where yuh kept that dynamite. Oh, yeah, we knew yuh had it. Mebby old Knight planted it for yuh, eh? He's an old powder man. And," Brawley grinned widely, "we jist figured that the old man had a battery up there in that lookout. Wasn't we right?"

"That's why yuh shot him?" asked McLeod.

"I'm not admittin' anything," grinned

Brawley. "As soon as the sheep get through I'm goin' to find out about that powder. I may want to bring more sheep through, and I don't want any dynamite bustin' under me."

"How close are the sheep?" asked Smith.

"Not far now. Listen!" They could hear them now, the bleating of thousands of sheep. McLeod gritted his teeth, trying to forget it. Brawley laughed at McLeod's expression. He shot a quick glance at Smith and turned to McLeod.

"McLeod, do you remember a man named Jim Sylvester?"

"Jim Sylvester? My old pardner, Brawley?"

"Yeah," Brawley smiled easily. Smith had leaned forward, his jaw tensed, his hand fondling the butt of his gun. He had not expected Brawley to mention him.

"Old Jim Sylvester," repeated Brawley, with evident satisfaction. "You stole his wife, yuh remember, McLeod."

"You lie!" McLeod lurched forward out of his chair, glaring at Brawley, who started back. McLeod's bound hands prevented him from attacking Brawley.

"I don't lie," retorted Brawley. "Old Sylvester told me himself."

McLeod stared at Brawley.

"He told you, Brawley? My old pardner told you? Is he alive? My —— don't stand there and grin at me. Talk, can't yuh?"

Brawley smiled crookedly. They could hear the sheep coming closer and closer. In a few minutes the leaders would come past the wrecked fence. And then nothing could ever hope to stop that gray flood from spewing over the Smoky River Valley.

Brawley shook his head.

"I don't know where he is, McLeod. But you stole his wife and he tried to kill you, but killed the wrong man. It was after you took her to Denver with you."

"Good ——!" McLeod had forgotten the sheep now. "That's a lie, Brawley. There was a baby comin'. Wasn't a doctor in the camp, and Jim had disappeared. I took her to Denver and put her in a hospital, where the baby was born."

"And then you married her, eh?"

McLeod shook his head slowly. "No," he said softly. "She died when the baby came. Jim never came back—never sent me any word. He located me in on the Nellie Lode and never showed up again, Brawley. I—I provided for the baby—afterward. And when I got married I took the baby. It was all I could do for my pardner, even if he did mistrust me. I gave her twenty dollars to buy baby clothes, and he thought—anyway, he owns half of what I've got, Brawley. It's in his name—Mazie knows it. As soon as she was old enough to understand—I told her. I'm the only dad she ever knew, and she took my name. I didn't play crooked with my old pardner, and I never beat him out of a cent. When Mazie is twenty-one, if Jim don't come back, it belongs to her."

Smith had got to his feet, his jaw sagging. He tried to say something, but his lips refused to function. Dazedly he looked at Mazie—his daughter.

Brawley turned and was looking at him, a curious expression on his face.

"I wish you'd tell me where Jim Sylvester is," said McLeod wearily. "—— knows, I've looked for him a long time."

"Half belongs to him, eh?" Brawley laughed harshly, his eyes on Smith's face. "That half won't be worth a —— to anybody."

Smith's face was working queerly; gray as ashes in the weak light of the room. His left hand went to his lips, as though trying to force himself to speak.

"Good God!" he blurted. It was like the croak of a raven.

Then his right hand whipped to his holster, yanking at his gun. Brawley jerked back, snatching out his gun; realizing that Smith was no longer a Brawley man.

They fired almost as one shot. Brawley staggered backward, his jaw sagging, as the two guns hurled lead across that narrow space. Smith was half turned around, his eyes almost shut, his body jerking from the shock of the heavy bullets.

Then Brawley crumpled to his knees, his head sagging, choking. Smith staggered back against the door, crashing into Lee Morse, who was running in to see what it was all about. Smith was first to recover his balance, and he swung his gun against Morse's head, knocking the tall cowboy back on to the porch.

Smith sagged against the wall, dropping his gun, his eyes shut tightly. McLeod could hear men yelling to each other. It seemed to revive Smith. He surged away from the wall, almost falling to the porch, staggering like a drunken man, as he made his way around to the right.

McLeod followed him, and behind him came Mazie, neither of them understanding why Brawley's man had turned on him. They reached the corner of the porch, from where they could see the little lookout shack against the cliff; the sheep-men at the wrecked fence.

Some of them had run back toward the house, seeking the meaning of the shots, while others merely stood and stared at Smith, the swamper, who was staggering up the slope, heading toward the tower, paying no attention to the questions which were yelled at him.

Dan Gatton came running. He saw McLeod and Mazie at the corner of the house, and stopped short a few feet away, a gun in his hand.

"What was it?" he demanded. "Who was shootin'?"

But neither of them told him; they were only interested in the man who was staggering up the slope; slipping, weaving, clawing his way up the narrow trail.

Gatton shoved McLeod aside and ran into the house. He was out in a moment, running past McLeod and Mazie, shouting at his men to stop Smith.

But they did not understand. The sheep were only a hundred yards away now, moving slowly; the leaders crowding back at sight of the men.

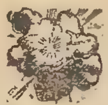
"Somebody stop him!" screamed Gatton, pointing at Smith, who was almost at the door of the shack.

Gatton began shooting, but too fast for accuracy. The bullets were throwing up spurts of dirt along the trail behind the staggering man.

A couple of other men began shooting at Smith. He went to his knees, clawing at the door, and Gatton began running up the slope. But Smith lurched to his feet and fell inside the house. Gatton stopped, as though undecided what to do.

He swung around and looked toward town, where three riders were coming up the road, their horses on a swift run. Gatton whirled and yelled at his men:

"Down the road! Look out!" He knew it was some of the cowboys. The sheepmen came running toward the house, and at that moment the slope behind them seemed to rise upward of its own volition, right in the path of the sheep, lifting the full width of the slope, from cliff to river.



THEN it vomited smoke, and the world shook so badly beneath the feet of the running men that several of them sprawled headlong. McLeod and Mazie staggered back beneath the roof of the porch, their ears ringing from the teriffic roar, while the sky rained dirt and stones.

But the sheep-men kept on going, running to get their horses, which had already torn down part of the fence where they had been tied. The men were in a panic. There was no Brawley to keep them in line now.

And while they fought to mount their frightened horses, Bud White, Jumpin' Bean and Jud Hanley rode into them. Bud selected Dan Gatton and rode against his horse against the horse that Gatton was trying to mount, knocking Gatton down, almost under the hoofs of the horse.

But there was no fight left in the sheepmen. They managed to get on their horses and went flailing off down across the hills. Bud dismounted and yanked Gatton to his feet. The foreman of the JAL held out protesting hands to Bud.

"I'm through, White!" he panted.

"Head for the house!" snapped Bud, and Gatton obeyed. McLeod and Mazie had seated themselves on the edge of the porch, and Bud herded Gatton up to them, followed by Jumpin' and Hanley.

One of the boys untied McLeod's hands, who motioned them into the house, where Brawley was sprawled on his face. Lee Morse was sitting up, nursing a huge bump on his head. He squinted at them, grimacing painfully.

"This sheep business is shore —— on a feller," he said.

"It's all over now," said Jumpin' Bean.

"Tha's good."

In a few words McLeod told them of the gun-battle between Brawley and Smith; of the gun fight, which seemed to have no reason for its beginning; and of how Smith fought his way to the tower and touched off the dynamite beneath the bluff.

"Smith killed Brawley, eh?" wondered Gatton. "I don't *sabe* it. Why, Smith was the man who schemed to capture this ranch and bring in the sheep. It was his own idea, McLeod."

McLeod shook his head wonderingly and they all walked up on the slope. Old Silent Knight's dynamite barrier had done more than he expected. It had sloughed the entire bluff over into the river, leaving a fifty foot wide chasm. Rocks were still rolling.

The sheep had not reached it. There were a few dead sheep, but the wave had rolled back on itself, crowding back, trampling itself to get as far as possible away. There would be many sheep trampled to death before the herders could get them all turned to relieve the pressure.

"I reckon that settles the sheep business," said Gatton wearily. "Brawley's dead and the Gateway is closed. I dunno that I care. I was workin' for Brawley. I haven't killed anybody. Brawley hired a man to shoot Knight."

"You two boys can go home," said McLeod. "You can tell the law what yuh know about it, if the sheriff starts anythin'."

"We'll tell the truth," said Gatton slowly. "Thank yuh, Mac."

He and Lee Morse turned and went back to their horses. The team and wagon was just coming into the ranch-house yard. Breezy West was on the seat, but there was no sign of Ames.

"Let's go up to the tower," said McLeod heavily.

They went up the little trail, stopping to look at Silent Knight, who was still curled up around the jack-pine stumps. At the door of the shack McLeod stopped and looked up the cañon, where a dust cloud almost obscured the retreating band of sheep.

Then they went into the little shack. It was a tiny place, filled to capacity with Knight's bunk, a chair and an old trunk. In the center of the floor sprawled the body of Smith, the swamper, one leg wrapped around the box of a blasting battery, his head cramped in a queer position.

"My ——!" exclaimed Jumpin'. "They broke both arms, and he held the box with his leg and pulled the handle with his teeth!"

"But why?" asked Bud hoarsely. "Why did he do it?"

No one seemed to know. McLeod turned the body over, stretching it out on the floor. There was a smile on the lips of the old swamper. McLeod leaned closer, studying the features; wondering for a moment—then knowing.

"The old jigger must 'a' went loco," said Jumpin' softly.

"Loco or not—he saved Smoky River Valley," said Bud.

McLeod got slowly to his feet, leaning against the wall. For several moments he looked down at the body of the man who had been his old partner; so changed in twenty years that there was little of the Jim Sylvester of old left.

"Jist a —— old swamper," said Jumpin'. "But we've sure got to give him a good funeral."

McLeod went back to the doorway, bracing himself against the frame, his eyes looking toward the vanishing sheep—but not seeing them.

"Yeah," he said slowly, "we've got to give him a big funeral—the biggest one ever held in Smoky River Valley."

"He deserves it, Dad," said Mazie softly.

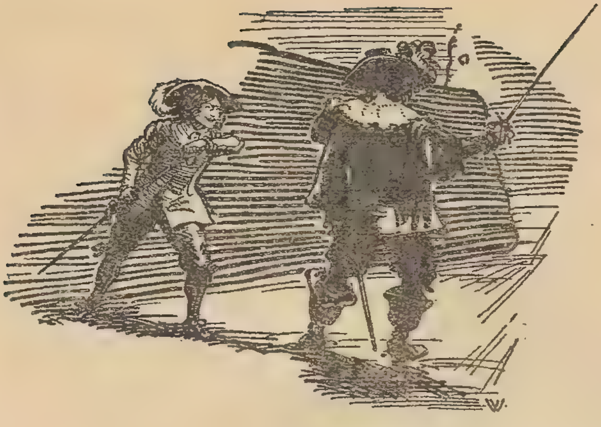
McLeod put his arm around her, nodding slowly, averting his eyes.

"You're crying, Dad," she said. McLeod choked slightly, but did not deny it.

"Well," said Bud, "you won. It was a close call, but yuh won."

"Yeah, I won," said McLeod thickly. "Mebby I won more than you think, Bud."

And they went back down the narrow trail to the ranch-house, while down at the Double O siding a train crew waited for some one to come and unload the sheep. And at Oro Madre they waited for a girl named Nellie to come and claim the legacy of Paw-Paw Jones. But as far as the story is concerned, it ended when Smith, the swamper, with two broken arms, fell inside the little shack and drew the handle of the blasting battery with his teeth—to save his old partner, who shot square.



THE KNIGHT OF THE THREE TINES

A Complete Novelette

By

Fairfax Downey

Author of "The Jinx of the Warlock," "Stand to Horse," etc.

SO DARK was it in the woods that Pierre Jourdain could scarce see an arm's length before him. Branches, interlaced thickly overhead, intensified the gloom, hiding a cold drizzling sky with autumn leaves. No use to climb a tree for a glimpse of the stars which would guide any true son of Brittany. The heavens were blank of constellations, and gave promise of remaining so for hours. The road, a miserable trail of muddy ruts, had carelessly been lost by the traveler. His attempts to cut back across it had only seemed to plunge him deeper into the forest.

Yet he could not be many leagues from Paris. He should have reached the great city by dusk. Even when night fell, he had felt no doubt. Surely the mighty capital of Louis XIV, *Le Roi Soleil*, would be easy to find. Somehow the very effulgence of the Sun King would light his way. The glare of torches would show from afar and the martial blare of trumpets carry on the wind, he had thought. But breaking the silence was only the drip of raindrops and vague, uncanny rustlings in the underbrush, which might be savage beasts or more savage robbers.

The young Breton halted uncertainly and shoved a forelock of jet black hair back beneath his bedraggled hat. His smooth brow contracted in a frown as he endeavored to stamp some of the water out of his high leathern boots. Better even that quiet and crumbling château which was home than a quest for fortune and adventure through such a maze as this. In Brittany the boom of the breakers or the roar of a torrent might tell a wanderer his way though the stars failed him.

But enough of such weak homesickness. Pierre resolutely squared his sturdy shoulders, stretched his long legs and drew his shabby cloak closer about him. Making sure that his rapier swung free at his side, he stretched his left hand out before him and pressed on through the blackness of the wood.

As he thrust through thick undergrowth so dense that he might have been blind for all his straining eyes could tell him, his outthrust hand smacked with terrifying suddenness against the cold and clammy palm of another hand. For a fraction of a second he held it there while bony fingers contorted against his. The heart of Pierre jerked wildly in his breast and leaped pounding into his throat. He jumped back, a frantic tide of Breton superstition flooding his dazed brain. Man or fiend? For another instant he hesitated. Should he cross himself or draw? In almost the same motion he did both, whipping his rapier from its scabbard and tossing it from his right hand to his left, for he fought left-handed. The swish of steel answered him from the blackness ahead. Ah, *le bon Dieu* be praised! Man!

A pause while each sword groped for the other. Then a clash as blade slithered on blade. Pierre sighed happily. He asked no more than such contact with a foe.

Then a husky voice came through the inky barrier of the night.

"Who are you?" it demanded.

"One who yields his purse to no robber, be it ever so empty," Pierre flung back.

"I crave not your purse," said the voice. "I am no robber, but a traveler. Guidance from out of these Stygian shades is all I value."

"I am in like case," Pierre admitted. "A simple traveler bound for Paris and lost in this forest. Advance if you will."

Points were raised and the two blades slid along each other until the men stood hilt against hilt, free hands clenched and ready. They stood thus, both unwilling to make a further move.

"A pox on this night!" the stranger swore mistrustfully. "Come forth, moon!"

As if obedient to his words, the night began to clear, and soon a thin beam of moonlight filtered through the branches. Pierre made out a man taller than himself, but thinner, with drooping mustache and heavy brows. As if satisfied, both sheathed their swords.

"I am called Ravignac," the stranger offered.

"And I, Pierre Jourdain of Brittany. This wood is a lonely pocket."

"True, and we are far from out of it unless we strike the road. Paris is not new to me, but I know not where to turn to find it."

Nevertheless, the two struck out together trusting that some hut might be found in the forest. As they walked, the wind shifted to another quarter of the compass, and into the nostrils of the travelers was blown an odor, faint but noisome. Pierre spat disgustedly, but Ravignac sniffed delightedly like a dog hot on the trail.

"Aha!" he cried. "That would be Paris. One may smell it leagues away. Turn, my fine fellow. We have now only to follow our noses."

That he spoke the truth, Pierre was to discover. The stench came ever stronger and stronger. By dawn they had struggled through the wood and were in sight of the gates of the city, where he had hoped to win his spurs and find a gateway to the glory which awaited any high-hearted young Frenchman who sought it.

The Breton fought with disillusionment. Why, this was the concentration of the essence of a thousand inland farmyards. What a contrast to his native coast where the sea breeze swept clean and the waves washed the beach, lending example to mankind! Was this overgrown dung heap the mighty capital of France?

But there must be no turning back to a poverty-stricken and humdrum life now, no inglorious return to a girl who had listened with shining eyes to his brave words. Pierre strode on. In the growing light he regarded his companion. Instinctively he began to dislike him. The man appeared to be a gentleman of sorts, but he had a sinister cast of countenance, a mysterious air. His very smile was sly.

Ravignac made a mock bow to the city they entered.

"Hail, Paris!" he greeted. "A kind mistress you can be. That I know of old. Surpass now your past favors. Here are two who seek a fortune of you."

Pierre, who had not yet dared relax the grip he kept on his nose, muttered contemptuously:

"Bah! Where is a fortune among these hovels? In this sty?"

"Look beyond," the other bade him. "Poverty is only for the dull and stupid."

Indeed, the provincial could not conceal his growing amazement at the vast extent of the huts and shacks and shops as they prepared to plunge into the labyrinth of the city's narrow, crooked streets. And rising above them the sight of the spires of Notre Dame and other churches cheered him and the sight of the Louvre and other palaces and residences half convinced him that he had not journeyed in vain. Then they turned into a lane so tortuous and so overhung by the projections of second stories that it was almost as if they had fared into a tunnel. Mud—thick, foul and clinging—that mud of Paris which was a byword even in foreign lands, sucked and tugged at their legs. Now and again they sank deep into miniature quagmires, pools of water of poisonous looking yellow and purple tinges. They struggled out and on, past and over grunting, wallowing pigs. Clouds of insects buzzed about their faces and back to the heaps of rotting matter which littered the street from end to end. An effluvia past all description rose up and smote the nostrils with the effect of a physical blow.

RAVIGNAC seemed but little disturbed, but his companion from the sea coast staggered and gasped, then hurried past him. They emerged into a street which was a trifle wider, but along its length ran an open sewer, along which gurgled a feculent stream giving forth miasmic exhalations and fairly reeking with pollution. Pierre drove his mud-encumbered feet forward.

"Quick!" he cried. "To the better quarter of the town!"

Ravignac laughed.

"There is none better," he said. "You are over nice for Paris, my young friend. Best go seek lodgings with the King at Versailles."

"But this must be a very plague spot!"

"Nay, but little of late years. There is much improvement. It was in the olden days that the taint was in every street and the folk perished by the tens of thousands. Now there are laws and some paving of streets and arching over of sewers."

The young Breton made no answer: his disgust was becoming unutterable. A glitter came into his dark eyes. Waves of stenches, together and separately, swept over him. Now it was the putrescent mounds of offal before a butcher shop. Now it was the charnal-house odor of an overcrowded graveyard. Now it was the very mud itself proverbial not only for its stickiness but its stink.

"Where this mud touches your clothes, you must cut out the piece." Ravignac grinned in enjoyment of his companion's discomfort. "It burns whatever it touches, they say."

Making their way to a lodging know to Ravignac, they turned down another narrow lane. Dwellers in it might almost clasp hands, leaning out from their upper casements. Suddenly from above came a cry in a woman's voice:

"*Gare l'eau!* 'Ware water!"

The wary Ravignac instantly pressed himself flat against the wall of that dwelling, but the luckless Pierre was doused by a flood of evilly aromatic water flung from the window out into the street. He choked, sputtered and directed a volley of sizzling Breton oaths at the window, but the wench only laughed shrilly at him and drew back within. Pierre strode on in such a towering rage he was almost inarticulate and half blind. Ravignac barely dragged him out of the way of a horse hauling a lumbering cart from the cracks of which a stream of black slime squelched out over the cloak of the young traveler. Pierre shouted and drew his rapier. He pursued and would have spitted the carter if he had not sunk so deep in a puddle that he became mired.

"You are well out of that," Ravignac declared when the befouled young man joined him. "You might have graced a gallows for murder."

Pierre said nothing, could say nothing. As best he could he scraped some of the filth from him.

"Is it then so cleanly on the coast of Brittany," the other baited him. "Keep watch for a shop and I will purchase you a rose and—"

He cut himself off short at the look in the Breton's eyes.

Suddenly walking together, they came to a small square not yet bustling with the life of the waking city. In a dark doorway a small group of men was gathered, Pierre saw faint smiles cross their faces as they regarded his sad condition. He halted belligerently.

"A lovely capital, this Paris," he sneered loudly. "The capital of all Stenchdom! A pretty reception it gives the stranger within its slimy gates! The greatest service its sewer rat citizenry might do a traveler is barring him out!"

"Be quiet, Gamecock," Ravignac warned.

"There remains about me one clean thing," Jourdain declared with all the insolence he could put into his voice. "And that is the blade of my sword. Fain would I put it in keeping with the rest of my person by sheathing it in the scabrous bodies of—"

"Silence, fool," hissed Ravignac. "You are—"

But Pierre thrust him roughly back with one hand and laid the other on the hilt of his sword.

A man advanced from the doorway, a calm, stalwart man with an air of authority and fearlessness clearly marked on his face. He did not draw.

"So you do not like Paris?" he asked quietly.

"Like it! This pesthole! This vile sink!"

"What then would you do about it," the man cut in quietly.

"Do about it?" roared the excited young Breton. "I would scour out this den of smut though I tore it down to do it!"

"Then are you my man," the stranger declared. In my service may you have your wish and win fame and wealth if you live. I am La Reynie, Chief of Police of Paris."

II

PIERRE JOURDAIN felt that Fate had played him a scurvy trick that day, a trick quite in keeping with this whited sepulchre of a city. She had beckoned him with her fair fame, shattered his illusions and trapped him neatly. Yet he had only his own quick temper and outspokenness to blame. He had thrown down the gage and it had been snatched up. His honor forbade him to withdraw the hot words of his challenge.

As a result, he could not place his sword at the service of the king and win his spurs in one of those armies whose victories were making glorious the name of France. He was committed to a post in the mere civil police of Paris. Surely any promises of advancement there must be empty ones. Still that answer of his to the sharp query, "What would you do?" had been given. He must keep to his word and prove himself no vain boaster.

And already he felt that La Reynie was a leader worthy of the following. There was strength in the bearing of the man and the stamp of intelligence on his brow. His men seemed devoted to him. From their conversation Pierre gathered that the chief had undertaken a task, thankless perhaps, but colossal. The power of the great king already had enabled him to do wonders, but opposed were all the powerful nobles and clergy on whose toes he might tread in his reforms, and evidently he could not step without finding some prerogative underfoot. He might depend upon the hearty ill will of the bourgeoisie too short-sighted to recognize the efforts for their betterment. War, the royal pleasures and the greed of the nobility drained the taxes. La Reynie could only take what he could get and trust in the continued support of the sovereign. Unfortunately Louis largely avoided his capital, though his genius could have made of Paris another Versailles.

Cleansed and newly arrayed, Pierre mustered the resolution to set about his distasteful task. A busy one he found it, and strenuous, yet one with moments of menace which might satisfy even an adventurous Breton. When the barges brought stone from Fontainebleau, the police must needs see to it that householders took it and paved each before his dwelling. They faced the deep-rooted hostility of a people with a deeper-rooted desire to let well enough alone. More than once Pierre saw the gathering of an angry mob and heard their threatening murmur which was only a little short of becoming a blood-craving roar.

Slowly but steadily he saw the scouring of the city progress.

Not many weeks of his service had passed before he was detailed to accompany La Reynie himself on a raid. Together they plodded through a muddy street. The mud of Paris was often too strong a foe even for the indefatigable chief. Together they dodged drenchings flung from windows. There, too, was an ancient custom which usually defied correction. But it was with a cry of triumph that the chief caught sight of a heap of garbage which had been dumped out upon the doorstep of a house of the better class. Here he was not powerless.

"Call forth the householder," La Reynie ordered.

Pierre pounded upon the door, and soon a dignified figure appeared. It was Corneille, the poet, the dramatist, beloved of all Paris for "The Cid."

"What means yon filth on your stoop?" La Reynie demanded.

"What matters it?" Corneille shrugged.

"It matters a fine of size."

The poet began to protest volubly, and quickly a crowd began to collect. They were not long in getting into an ugly mood. Either they did not know the chief or they disregarded him. Their circle narrowed in on the two members of the police. Pierre's right hand went to his sword hilt, but La Reynie held his arm and turned to the scolding Corneille and, in a loud voice, demanded—

"Is it by this filth on your stoop that you design to make Paris the 'enchanted isle' of which you write?"

At this quoting of the poet's own words against him, the muttering crowd broke into laughter. From that moment danger ceased. The people sauntered away chuckling over such a *bon mot* as Parisians prize.

"Diplomacy before force," La Reynie cautioned his subordinate. "See that you forget it not."

That very evening Pierre had opportunity to put that advice in use. He was giving orders to two shopkeepers to remove projections of their booths which made the street almost impassable and to reduce the size of the ridiculously huge signs which flapped from their walls. The shopkeepers were surly, but made no strenuous objections. But Pierre noticed them send a boy tearing down the street. The men had not much more than started on their slow obedience before he heard a suave, familiar voice at his elbow.

"We meet again, my young friend," Ravignac greeted. "And again I come to offer you counsel. Was not my last which you failed to heed good?"

"I misdoubt that it was," Pierre spoke up loyally.

"So? Not this time then. I come to suggest that you direct your efforts of reform against other merchants. It so happens that these twain are under the patronage of Madame d'Argenton."

"We can not take account of patronage, else nothing would be accomplished."

"My headlong young Breton," Ravignac purred. "You must not be aware of the identity of Madame d'Argenton. She is the mistress of the Duke of Orleans. And the Duke of Orleans, even the young and inexperienced should know, is a mighty general and the nephew of the king."

"We fulfill the king's commands."

"Within reason. Best seek some others of them to fulfill." A note of menace was evident in the smooth voice of Ravignac. "I am become attached to the household of the Duke. I am versed in certain arts of magic and other matters which make me of value to him. Thus I am in a case to know his power. My rede to you is do not cross him or worse, his mistress."

"My thanks for your rede, monsieur," Pierre answered with new-learned restraint. "I but act under the orders of my chief. I pray you make your complaint to him."

Ravignac's heavy brows drew down.

"Enough!" he snarled. "Be your fate on your own head. I have some skill in reading the future, monsieur. I foretell for you an imminent and a fatal accident."

Pierre laughed, turned his back on the man and proceeded to see to the demolition of the offending parts of the shops. It was dark by the time the work had been done, and he set out on his return to his lodgings. Striding along past the wharves on the Seine, he saw three who lurked in a shadow waiting for him. With bravado he walked on, and deliberately the tallest of the three stepped out and jostled him, forcing a fight. Well, let them have it. Here was a wall he could put his back to.

He drew his rapier swiftly, but the sword of the tall man had been out already, concealed behind his cloak. It flashed up and beat at the blade of Pierre in just that instant when he was tossing it from the right hand that drew it to the left hand with which he fenced. Some one knew that weak moment in his defense, knew when to strike to disarm him. Fool that he was to wear his sword at his left side merely because it was usual!

His rapier dropped into the mud and the tall man dexterously kicked it into the river.

"Now, my bravos," the tall man called to the others. "And no knives, no marks of violence. Here is one about to fall innocently and drunkenly into the Seine. His body, if they find it, must bear that out."

THE two heavy thugs closed in on Pierre. He clenched his fists and struck out to the right and left, shouting for succor. But soon he left off that; he would have too great need of all his breath. Their ham-like hands thudded through his guard against his skull. Bah! That a gentleman should have to tussle with such as these! Should have to trade buffets with these dogs who would never have passed the dancing point of his sword. Pierre's lips curled in scorn until a sharp blow left them puffed and bleeding.

All the while the tall man stood off and in a voice—hoarse, as if disguised—cheered his assassins on cynically.

"Lay on, my bravos, lay on. But gently as may be. Bruise not his pretty face so. Have done, have done. Need you all night. Had I known, I would have brought a score more of you."

The Breton, though trained only to the sword, was young and strong. His blows drew startled grunts from his two heavier adversaries. But two to one is large odds.

One of the men struck up viciously at his jaw. Pierre snapped his head back a little and the blow sailed past, but the edge of it caught him between the nostrils and ripped into the super-tender cartilege there. He uttered a cry of agony and his hands went up to protect his face. Then the second thug put all the weight of his body behind a smash into the pit of Pierre's stomach.

As he doubled up, they put their shoulders down and rushed him. One on either side they propelled him to the edge of wharf. Beneath his feet he felt a terrible emptiness, and the black waters of the Seine engulfed him.

"Take poles and shove him under if he comes up," the tall leader commanded.

But the Breton did not come up. As soon as his tortured body could straighten out of its cramp, he struck out under water. At last when his lungs seemed about to burst, he came to the surface. Luckily he was well out in the river and lost in its shadows.

Yet not so luckily perhaps. A son of Brittany is often a strong swimmer, one who dares brave the seas of his coast, but this was the Seine, the polluted Seine, the sink of refuse thrown from both banks. People bathed in the Seine and drank of its waters and lived. But Pierre had not been able to choose his section of the river. His senses swirling from the noxious ripples which lapped at his face and from the effects of the blow in his midriff, his strokes grew weaker and weaker. What a futile, inglorious end for one who might have died with his face to the enemy!

He was very feeble now, was Pierre Jourdain, and near to giving up and sinking. He thought dully that he was about to join his sword at the bottom of the Seine. Alas, the curse of his left-handedness! He might have slain those ruffians by now. That tall one—the vague familiarity of his voice noted even in the heat of the fight—Ravignac! Ravignac! If only he could live to meet him!

The dulling desire for life reawakened, Pierre struggled higher in the water. Then slowly, as if a great weight of iron dragged on him, he began to sink—drowning.

From somewhere in the blackness of the night came a soft voice inquiring—

"Monsieur perchance requires assistance?"

The drowning man could only gasp.

"Or perchance monsieur swims for pleasure?" the voice questioned courteously.

Pierre managed one choking "Help!" and an oar blade met his desperate clutch.

III

PIERRE JOURDAIN of the police regained consciousness in a small, bare room. Through half opened eyelids he discerned in the dim light an old man writing busily at a desk. His face was kindly, his figure tall and spare. The air of distinction about him, his attire neat though shabby, the well garnished condition of his surroundings all bespoke the broken-down gentleman whose pride sustains his spirit. His pen scratched away with vast enthusiasm.

Pierre stirred, and at once his host rose, approached and made him a bow of true elegance.

"I trust, monsieur, that you begin to recover," the old gentleman murmured in well bred tones. "I have done all in my meager power to assure your comfort."

The rescued nodded, looking down at the white counterpane over him and becoming conscious of cleanliness and ease.

"Welcome to my poor abode," the other pursued. "But a thousand pardons, monsieur. I have not yet introduced myself. I am Victor d'Istrait, an humble writer of no consequence."

"I have to thank you for my life," Pierre said gratefully.

"It was my great good fortune to be at hand in your time of need. At first I was reluctant. I feared I might intrude. It would have been insulting to offer aid to one who took pleasure in swimming. The courtesies are too little heeded in these days. The *civilités* are forgotten. The practise of etiquette threatens to become a lost art. That is why I devote myself to setting them down on paper." The old chap motioned grandly toward his desk. "There lie the makings of a book designed to revive and perpetuate politeness in this otherwise glorious day and age. Alas! There is so little interest that I can not obtain subscriptions for its printing."

"Indeed a pity. Can you not procure interest at court?"

"I seek there in vain. None remembers old d'Istrait. The mirror into which all France should look to learn the courtesies of life, the Court, is sadly clouded."

"Perhaps I may be able to say a word of some avail?" Pierre offered, and the old gentleman brightened wonderfully.

Here was a way, Pierre reflected, whereby he might in some measure repay his rescuer.

A WEEK later Pierre was escorting his savior to a dinner at the palace. Not as guests, to be sure, but as lookers-on. The tradition of the public dinner was an old one in the Court, and Louis XIV had maintained it strongly. The public was privileged to stroll through the palace and gape to their hearts' content at royalty and nobility banqueting. As a member of the police, Pierre might be to the fore.

"It may be that the old gentleman will meet there some noble who may care to recall him," had advised La Reynie whose suggestion attendance at the dinner was. "D'Istrait may then obtain permission to address a few remarks while the lords and ladies are at table. They are not averse to entertainment and, unless I mistake me, they will regard his words as that. Those idlers seize readily on any fad of promise such as the old fellow's ideas upon the *civilités* may prove to be. There lies his opportunity, though he runs the risk of giving offense."

It befell that the luck of the two was with them, for they encountered the Count de Longue, a middle-aged nobleman who fancied his wit and was ever looking for a butt for it.

"Ho, d'Istrait," the nobleman condescended as they met in an anteroom. "You here to stare hungrily at the banquet board? Since when became you a country cousin. There was a day when you might have dined at some table in the palace."

"So there was once," the old gentleman answered sadly. "Now I come only to refresh my memories of the manners of the Court upon which I am preparing a book."

The Count laughed carelessly and strolled away.

"Perchance he may take note of you later," Pierre encouraged his friend.

And so it happened, for the Count de Longue glanced up from the table where he sat with nobility who were members of the royal household.

"There is old d'Istrait," he remarked loudly to the lady next to him. "He was at court some years ago. You ought to remember him."

The company laughed, but it was impossible to tell for the cosmetics which covered her somewhat withered cheeks if the lady blushed.

In his assumed status as a jester, de Longue was free with his tongue. He babbled on:

"See, d'Istrait, you authority on etiquette, how well we manage these forks. It is but a pose. We all really prefer the old fashioned method of using the fingers, as does our gracious king."

"Monsieur le Compte, the use of the fork is best, if I may venture to speak," d'Istrait replied. "But it would be well to take less upon it and to dispose of what already is in the mouth before adding to its content."

Pierre stood aghast, but it was impossible to discomfit de Longue. He joined in the laugh.

"Continue the lesson, Professor," he mumbled through a very full mouth.

"A word of the napkin, if I may," the old gentleman lectured. "It should be spread upon the knees, and if the ladies will drink with a trifle more care, they need not hold it beneath their chins. Wipe your knives, forks and spoons with the napkin after every course if you will but avoid scouring your plate or mopping your brow with it. And oh, forebear, as I note some of you, I pray you forebear using it as a pocket handkerchief."

Pierre nervously tugged at d'Istrait's sleeve, but apparently no offense had been taken, and he discoursed on:

"Nothing is more improper than for a guest to lick his fingers or wipe them on the tablecloth or bread. I fear me now, mesdames and messieurs, that you will require a fresh tablecloth before the end of the meal. I refer you again to your napkins rather than your doublets, gentlemen."

"Bravo, bravo!" the ladies cried. "And have you no special word for us, old death's-head-at-the-feast?"

"Forgive me, mesdames," said the old gentleman apologetically, "but I am sure it would be more elegant should you have more sparing recourse to your cups. The more elderly duchesses may drain bumper after bumper, but you who might be their daughters," he added slyly, "are like soon to be under the table."

"Your health, old scarecrow!" a nobleman called, raising his cup. "We of the stronger sex may drink more heartily."

"Somewhat," d'Istrait assented, "but would you might refrain in so doing from puffing out the cheeks, gurgling so loudly and snorting after each draught with satisfaction."

And so the meal proceeded merrily, the laugh being turned from one to another.

"I fear to make mention of it," d'Istrait whispered to Pierre, "but it is extremely ill bred of the Count de Longue to scratch himself so vigorously during dinner."

"I would keep silence as to that," the

Breton agreed. "Already you have taken bold liberties."

But the Count was oblivious of any breach of manners. He only took occasion to regard the finery of his dress in a mirror across the hall. Then he sniffed with all the abandon of a stag hound. A strong essence, the combination of musk, flowers and various spices, had pervaded the room.

"Either one of you ladies has adopted a new perfume or the roast is about to be served," the Count chortled.

It chanced to be the roast which came in, reeking of scented powders. It was followed by mackerel cooked in fennel, pastry soggy with more musk and amber and walnuts eaten with rosewater. Upon game and tarts and truffles the guests fell with such eagerness that d'Istrait shook his head, but they only roared at him. They were hugely amused at his look of pain when one fished around in a dish of meat until he found his favorite piece, when one refused a vegetable after smelling at it, when one gulped a too hot morsel and got rid of it primitively. He chided a gentleman who beat a bone on the table and shook it to extract its marrow. When a lady choked from a rapid swallow of soup, he admonished—

"Pardon, madame, but that is not only impolite but inconvenient."

"Now for the eighteen ways of peeling a pear," de Longue shouted jocosely. "You see I am not unversed in the *civilités*, Professor d'Istrait."

"Better versed," agreed the mentor coldly, "than yon gentleman who is putting two pears in his pockets to take home."

D'Istrait was ahead of his times. He might have suffered martyrdom, but he had the good fortune to meet with tipsy acclaim. These polished courtiers of the glittering entourage of Louis Quatorze chose to regard him as a delightful old crank, a banisher of boredom. They hastened to make subscription to his book and promised many more.

"You shall have an audience with the king himself," de Longue vowed merrily. "Such a gallant trencherman can not fail but have great glee of you. 'Twill prove a novel amusement to hear you hold forth. In eating he has concerned himself with how much and never how!"

Going home, d'Istrait was walking on air.

"You have helped me realize the dream of my life," he told Pierre gratefully. "My book is now assured. Ah, what need they have of it!"

Glad as he was to have aided his benefactor, Pierre was sure he never would risk another such appearance. That had been thin ice they had skated on. If the courtiers had shown resentment, he might now have been escorting the man who had saved his life to the Bastile. His nerves were still jumpy. As they walked on, he felt of his rapier hilt. It hung at his right side now. There must be no loss of time, once so nearly fatal, before it was drawn and ready in his sword hand.

IN THE meantime a widely different gathering had been taking place at the house of Madame d'Argenton. There mirth over the rules of behavior would have been regarded as a rather flat diversion. Madame made her own rules as she made her own title. When, as the mistress of the Duke of Orleans, it became scandalous for her to be known any longer as Mademoiselle de Séry, she had demanded that she be called Madame d'Argenton, and letters-patent to that effect were shortly forthcoming from the reluctant king who was unwilling to deny Orleans, his nephew. An atmosphere of intrigue was thick in the home of this handsome, imperious lady, and even the enmity of the powerful Madame de Maintenon, mistress of the king, availed nothing against her.

Now madame was tempestuously displeased with the newest member of her entourage. Ravignac hung his head before her wrath.

"Bungler!" she flung at him. "Must you fail on so slight a task! You report to me this young meddler of the police lies at the bottom of the Seine. Next day I see him swaggering through the streets."

"I myself watched this fellow Jourdain sink," Ravignac growled.

"What of that, slipshod? He still lives."

"It is not well to trifle with the men of La Reynie."

"Go to, you—"

Madame broke off suddenly. The black eyes of Ravignac glinting like a snake's held hers. With an effort she wrenched her gaze away.

"I will attend to that task," came his suave voice. "In the meantime I can be of other service to madame. The Duke shall see that tonight which will bring him here oftener in reach of your charms and confound those who plot when you are apart."

At that moment the Duke of Orleans entered, accompanied by his companion, the caustic-tongued Duke de St. Christophe.

"Madame," greeted the latter, bowing mockingly. "My friend steals time from affairs of state for a brief visit here. Magic draws him—other than your own. He learns you have now in your service one who can raise the ——. I tell him he wastes his time. Who is superior in raising the —— to the Duke of Orleans?"

A smile crossed the face of Orleans, a face on which the stern lines of an able general mingled with traces of debauchery.

"Come, let us see the incantations of this magician of yours, madame," he urged eagerly.

Ravignac stepped forward. His mien was impressive, Mephistophelian. St. Christophe muttered that the —— already had been raised by the mother of this fellow. The magician commanded that all lights be put out save for two small candelabras upon a small table in the center of the room. Upon that table he caused to be placed a crystal bowl of clear water. Then he required the presence of a girl, young and innocent, from the household.

"Quite young," the Duke de St. Christophe supplemented cynically.

A child approached trembling. Ravignac placed her before the bowl opposite him and ordered her to gaze into the water. There she met the reflection of his smouldering eyes.

"Ask what you will, my lord," said the magician softly.

Orleans inquired about the company in the home of Madame de Nancre from which he just had come. The frightened voice of the child described all exactly. Impressed, Orleans asked other questions to all of which satisfactory answers were given. At last he asked in tones which trembled in spite of him—

"Can you foresee the future?"

"Ask."

Ravignac's voice was hollow and unearthly. He did not raise his head.

Orleans asked to see what would take place at the king's death. Without hesitation the girl described the king lying on his deathbed at Versailles, gave in detail the appearance of surrounding courtiers whom she did not know but who were recognizable to her auditors—Madame de Maintenon, Fagon, the Princess of Conti and others. She cried out that she saw the Duke of Orleans.

"And later!" the Duke exclaimed.

But the girl had sprung back, pale and gasping.

The sharp eyes of Ravignac swept up and fixed themselves on the Duke.

"I saw a crown on your head, then the waters became troubled," the magician whispered.

As Ravignac watched like a hawk, Orleans changed color. Then he summoned his companion and took a hasty departure.

"There goes one who would be king!" Ravignac muttered to himself. "What fortune awaits a man who can help him to it!"

IV

WITH manifest pride the old silversmith gave one last rub for luster to his handiwork and laid it down on the counter before the two men who had entered his shop. It was a fork, a large, heavy utensil of three thick tines which tapered gracefully down into sharp points. In spite of its size—it might almost have been a serving fork—its proportions were perfectly balanced. Upon its handle the royal arms of France were cunningly wrought and a delicate and intricate pattern engraved below down to the base of the tines.

"It is beautiful!" d'Istrait exclaimed. "Yet it seems a trifle cumbersome."

"Beautiful and cumbersome, yes. Hence most suitable to the Court," Pierre Jourdain smiled.

"I made a work of art, not a kitchen tool," the silversmith grumbled.

"And you did marvelous well," Pierre complimented. "The king can not but take delight in such a gift."

"I spend nearly my all upon it," d'Istrait sighed, laying down payment. "But the favor it gains must be the making of me and my book. When his Majesty receives me at his supper tonight, I may even see him eat with this lovely thing of silver, addicted to the use of his fingers though he is. How the Court would buzz with my name! I would become the vogue."

"*Le bon Dieu* grant you may!" Pierre wished him affectionately.

Taking their purchase, the old man and the young left the shop arm in arm. He had come to love this kindly old gentleman as a father, had Pierre. He could never pay his debt of gratitude for his rescue from a horrible death in the Seine. Yet he did not regret that he need not appear with d'Istrait at Versailles that night. He had found the last exposition of etiquette nerve wracking enough.

As he left his friend at the door of his tiny home, Pierre swung sharply around. A vague but insistent suspicion that they were being followed had preyed on him. But the dark, crooked street seemed deserted. The excited champion of the *civilités* went in to prepare himself for audience of the evening. Already it was afternoon. He must go out and hire a coach for the twelve-mile drive to Versailles. Then he must bathe and mend his ancient court suit. Busied as he was, he took time to bid a courtly farewell. Pierre strode off to his duties.

It was already night when Pierre left the quarters of the police for his own dwelling. Past the hour of eight. D'Istrait would be waiting at Versailles now, Pierre reflected, though Louis did not sup until ten, a late hour but so prodigiously did he dine at one o'clock that an earlier supper would be physically impossible. The old gentleman would be waiting eagerly, his gift of the silver fork clutched tight in its case by his shaking hands.

So lost was the Breton in his thoughts that he collided with a little, bent man. He begged his pardon and the other was about to pass on grumbling when a shaft of light illumined both faces. It was the silversmith of the morning.

"So it is you who go blundering through the streets," said the smith, now good natured. "You are not blind, though, for you admire craft in the working of silver. Would you could have dissuaded your ancient friend from sending back the fork."

"Did he send it back then?" Pierre asked, surprized. "I knew nothing of that."

"Of a certainty, with the foolish message that the tines should be bored out and made hollow. His word was that the fork weighed too heavily and must be made lighter. I was ill agreed, but there was no gainsaying the tall, dark fellow sent by Monsieur d'Istrait. The man was in haste, too. I disliked him. He had an evil look."

"I know nothing of the message or messenger. But the hand of the king must not be fatigued by his fork," Pierre laughed and walked on.

He was vaguely puzzled. The matter went quickly out of his head, however. Ahead of him in the street a familiar figure moved. Seeing that his rapier was free in his sheath, he hurried to overtake the man. A glance at the sharp face confirmed his guess. It was Ravignac.

"A word with you," Pierre demanded.

The hot blood pounded in his temples, for certainty had come to him that his erstwhile companion of the woods and his would-be assassin of the Seine dock were one.

"Well met!" exclaimed Ravignac in recognition. "There is between us certain unfinished business."

His hand darted to his sword hilt, but halted there, for he had seen that his adversary's left hand was already at his right side. Ravignac's teeth showed in a sour smile.

"So the provincial is not to be caught again at the draw," he sneered. "No matter. Perhaps your death will seem the easier to you after some small swordplay."

"You count yourself a master of fencing then?" Pierre interposed craftily.

"To that I could bring no few witnesses, but alas! they are all dead."

"A pity then that in this poor light your swordsmanship can not display itself to best advantage. Chance may even enter in."

"Not so," Ravignac declared confidently. "But in all charity you should have opportunity to admire that which finishes you. I would seek out lights if only I were sure you would not seize the first moment to bawl for your police to save you."

"My score with you is a private one," Pierre swore hotly. "I take my oath no call for aid will come from me."

"I accept. You are simpleton enough to hold by an oath," the magician dryly returned.

He was well aware of what the younger man had suggested, that in bad light a blundering thrust may go home.

"Yonder is the courtyard of an inn where they are wasteful with their torches," Ravignac continued. "The revelry within will drown what little ringing of steel there may be. There would be as good a spot as any for your body to be found."

"Well enough."

With no further word Pierre made for the courtyard, yet watching the other sharply for any treacherous move. They entered, threw off cloaks and doublets and rolled up the sleeves of their shirts from their sword arms. Ever one to leave little to chance and, confident with good reason of his skill with the rapier, Ravignac nevertheless began to have some slight qualms over his boastful words. This was a well made young fellow who faced him and he was dangerously calm.

These fire-eating youngsters often sought out adventure for its own sake. Loving life, yet they put their lives in jeopardy. This young fool longed to swagger back to Brittany some day, first having made his way and his fortune. Why should he place obstacles in his own way then, offend powerful ones? Honor and glory and patriotism, eh? That stuff! Ravignac snarled. He had no mercy for such dolts and their folly.

Yet it would be well to say something to upset that mental poise, something that would shake him so that brain and eye and hand might not work so well together. It was the way of Ravignac to make doubly sure of his victims. Why should he not admit his plot? A dead man could not betray him.

They drew their rapiers. They glared hatefully at each other. But before they engaged the cold voice of Ravignac announced:

"Your old codger, d'Istrait will not survive you long. Shortly he will be giving the king a gift of a fork. I misdoubt that Louis will like the fork. Its tines are hollowed out and filled with a deadly poison which hot food melting the stopping wax will liberate."

Pierre stood frozen with horror.

The plotter finished rapidly:

"When the crown of Louis is on the brow of Orleans, what a reward I will claim!"

Pierre would have cried out for help in spite of his oath. What mattered now personal scores or petty enmities? The fate of the throne of France lay in the balance. The great king was in deadly peril. But anticipating the effect of his words, Ravignac was on him like a thunderclap. Only the instinct of a swordsman enabled him to turn aside those fierce, lightning thrusts.

AT VERSAILLES, Louis XIV, *Le Grand Monarque*, was about to sup. Some privileged few sat at table with him. About the walls stood a press of lords and ladies, the air thick with the perfumes with which they had drenched their persons. Their polished demeanor could not quite conceal their anticipation; they had the look of spectators awaiting the rising of a theater curtain. The prowess of his Majesty as a trencherman never failed to rouse the wonder of his subjects. For him alone a sizable cauldron of soup now was bubbling in the kitchen. For him a whole pheasant and a partridge were turning on spits and also prepared was a great plate of salad, two thick slices of ham, a plate of mutton seasoned with garlic, pastry and, to conclude the meal, fruit and hard-boiled eggs. So much and more the king might be counted upon to consume.

His Majesty's teeth were bad. Already he suffered from dyspepsia and gout and an increasing array of other ills. It was necessary to have a doctor in attendance at his meals. But nothing could daunt Louis in his doing of more than justice to French cookery. The Sun King whose reign was so brilliant and glorious was the subject of his stomach. What a marvel that he ruled with such rare energy in spite of that, created the most brilliant of court-life, added so much to the extent, the prosperity and the civilization of France!

With the first gulps of soup, his appetite awoke. It was not until the interval before the next course that he noted the gift of the shining silver fork beside his plate. A shade of displeasure darkened the monarch's countenance; it was known he had no use for such utensils. But the beauty of its workmanship caught his interest. There showed the patron of the arts. Gross he might be at the table, but Louis of France ever encouraged the achievement of the beautiful. Benignly he gazed around the room and inquired who was the giver.

"It is this gentleman, your Majesty," spoke the Count de Longue boldly. "He prepares a book on your Majesty's reign as the Golden Age of the *Civiletés*."

Pleased appreciation and interest shone in the eyes of the king.

"We are tempted to try the thing, frippery though it be," he declared.

A plate of steaming viands was set before him. D'Istrait sighed happily and leaned forward.

IN THE courtyard of the inn in Paris the torches still burned brightly and the songs and ribaldry within grew louder, covering the furious clash of steel as the two men outside fought on. No matter of minutes was this. It bid fair to be a duel to exhaustion.

The exasperation of Ravignac grew. He had expected to finish off this provincial in a few passes, and his ability as a fencer had seemed to justify that expectation as no vainglorious one. But this boy had had a master who had taught him well.

Ravignac doubled, circled the point of his enemy and lunged to the full extent of his amazing length, but Pierre leaped back, countered and turned aside the point. Back whipped a riposte which it was not easy to parry. *Clang! Clang! Clang!* sounded the swift, staccato music of good steel.

The older man cursed the left-handedness of his opponent. While it is the average case for a left-handed fencer to face a right-handed, for the latter it is a disconcerting exception. Pierre's point ever menaced from a strange quarter. A rent in Ravignac's shirt under his right arm showed how close a thrust had come.

Ravignac pressed in. He lunged viciously again and again. Each iron-wristed parry rankled, fired his impatience. He must make an end of this.

On the defensive, Pierre was hard put to it to guard himself. Time and again his foe's point almost won through. It rang against the guard of his hilt. Cold shivers chased up and down his spine. The utter ferocity of the arch-plotter's attack, his necessity of silencing forever a member of the police who knew far too much, the demoniacal glare on the face of this familiar of the black arts—all these gnawed at the control of the Breton. Panic and death were very near.

Pierre gave back again and again. It seemed he could make no further stand. Came a feint of swift deceptiveness. Pierre's guard swung over to meet it, left him open. Then a lunge like the spring of a catapult's arm and a streak of white-hot pain seared the left side of the Breton just below his ribs. Only a frantic twist of his body had kept steel out of his heart.

Pierre went fighting mad. Rapier sweeping like a flail, he flung himself on Ravignac. It was the assault of a wild man, a savage contemptuous of the art of fencing—the blind rage of one who seeks in an instant to kill or be killed.

The raging abandon of the attack forced Ravignac to stumble back, gasping, warding off crazy blows. He lost a golden opportunity. One steady thrust, and his enemy would have impaled himself on his blade. At last with a series of cat-like leaps he sprang back and clear.

The swordsmen stood facing, their blades drooping wearily. Their sweat-soaked shirts clung to chests which heaved as lungs panted for air. And in that interval sanity returned to Pierre. He heard not the drunken songs from the inn. Only the advice of his wise, old fencing master dinned in his ears.

"Be calm, fool! Is that a bludgeon in your hand? Steady, and bring your point in line. Then thrust!"

Again rapier met rapier. Ravignac sensed the new strength, the deadly resolve of his adversary. Desperation seized on him. He would have need, stern need of his *coup*. Little had he thought it would come to that. In the fraction of a second which was all he could spare from his defense, his eyes darted to the base of his rapier blade.

Now the rapier is ordinarily a weapon of thrusting, not of cutting like the saber. But at the base of the blade of Ravignac's sword where it thickened into triangular shape and entered the hilt, one of the edges projected slightly. It was of razor sharpness. He shifted his hilt in his hand so that this edge was brought toward his foe.

The beat of steel rose to a violent tempo. Points darted out and threatened like serpent tongues. Then, after a feint of marvelous celerity, Ravignac lunged. His point slid far past the other's body. With the cutting edge of his rapier he hacked in with the *coup de Jurac* at the back of Pierre's extended left leg, at the tendons at the back of his knee. A fencer who is hamstrung has a mainspring snapped. He is helpless.

With a terrific effort, Pierre rotated his blade. It swung down to the left and smote the fatal edge away with a clash. Then it swung up. As if he fought with a dagger, Pierre thrust down at the other, still extended in his lunge. The point entered

Ravignac's neck above the collar bone and found his heart.

Pierre stood tottering for a minute over the body at his feet. Then the remembrance of the poisoned fork flooded his brain. Panting he staggered off for the bureau of the police.

By great good luck, he found La Reynie. A few desperate words and Pierre and his chief were in the saddle and off at a dead gallop for Versailles. No time to tell of the fork, only to say that the king's life was in danger. It was half past nine o'clock. The king supped at ten. And it was twelve miles to Versailles.

LOUIS raised the silver fork in greasy and unaccustomed fingers. D'Istrait watched him disappointedly and pessimistically. The monarch had not deigned to try the utensil on several of the courses which had followed the soup. The urge of his prodigious appetite had been too strong to admit of the delays of such a refinement. D'Istrait doubted if he would use it at all now.

A serving man entered bearing a great bowl from which rose the savory odor of a ragout of mutton, the more appetizing since few spices had been used in its preparation. Out in the kitchen the chief servitor had made the *essaie* upon that ragout, tasting it—somewhat more thoroughly than was necessary—to make certain that it had not been poisoned. He had smacked his lips over the testing; then touched the dish with an agate. The agate having failed to sweat blood, it was regarded as certain that the king's food had not been tampered with.

Louis and his table guests sniffed with gusto. Set before the king, the ragout steamed with its warmth.

At the entrance to the hall arose a slight stir. La Reynie, chief of police and one of his men, breathless from hard riding, had slipped in. But the attention of the company soon returned to royalty.

Pierre saw the king raise the strange fork. It seemed almost worth using. In just such a steaming hot dish Louis had more than once burned a hand while exploring it for a favorite morsel.

Pierre was about to cry out. He felt the compelling eyes of La Reynie hard upon him. But across the hall the white, hopeful face of d'Istrait stood out. A shouted warning, "Beware, your Majesty! That fork is poisoned!" would mean the old gentleman's ruin, perhaps his death. For a second Pierre hesitated. Then he thrust forward, opened his lips to cry out. France first! First the life of the king whose name meant victory to his armies!

Another but a clamorous stir at the entrance and the Duke of Orleans burst in.

"Thanks be to God! You are safe!" he exclaimed, hurrying anxiously toward the king.

"What? What?" Louis stuttered.

The silver fork he had held poised to plunge into a piece of mutton clattered to the table.

"I have but just unearthed a plot," Orleans explained rapidly. "Members of my household told me of a black rogue called Ravignac who sought your Majesty's life. At once I set out to hunt him down. I found his body in the courtyard of an inn in Paris. One who watched from hiding said a young recruit of the police had run a rapier through his heart in as pretty a fight as one could ask to see. I rode hither at all speed to make certain the villain had no accomplices."

The hall hummed with wild excitement. The king toyed nervously with the silver fork.

La Reynie, who had made a swift demand of Pierre, pushed forward.

"Permit me, your Majesty," he spoke sonorously, "to present my recruit Jourdain, the victor in that fight!"

He motioned Pierre to stand forth.

"Our thanks, young man," the king beamed. "Ask what you will of us."

"That which your gracious hand touches, Sire," Pierre said.

"What? This bauble?" the king smiled, holding up the fork. "Take it then from our hand. It might have been a portion of our dinner which our fingers would have relinquished with greater reluctance."

Pierre sighed with vast relief. He did not mind the hurt look old d'Istrait gave him. That would soon be banished.

Again the King spared speech before returning to his meal.

"The gift is too meager for the service. Receive, too, a captaincy in our guards and knighthood."

Pierre knelt in gratitude and Louis laid a courtier's sword over his shoulder.

"Your crest a fork with three tines rampant," the grand monarch proclaimed merrily. "Rise, Sir Knight of the Three Tines!"

ECONOMY

by Leonard H. Nason

I'M A reserve officer, and a second lieutenant at that. Every year I go to the nearest fort and put in two weeks doing my bit. I always get myself attached to a troop, because these summer camps are usually a madhouse for any one that knows a curb from a snaffle, so I don't attend. Last spring I was at a cavalry post in the West, and was serving with a troop commanded by a man that I used to "horse" when he and I were cadets together. The first morning we went out to drill, he began to show me some movements in the new cavalry drill manual. The cavalry drill regulations are changed every little while, so that no foreign power can get wise to them, I suppose. Well, now they have a platoon armed with rifles and one armed with machine rifles in each troop, and the machine-rifle platoon has to do a lot of galloping. After about the second command the troop was a mob, with four or five bolting horses on their way to the stables.

"You're a —— of a troop-commander," I remarked. He was an old friend of mine, remember.

"What can I do?" said he. "Every third day this troop goes on guard, and I hardly have men left to exercise the horses. Then with what men are in the guard-house, absent without leave or on special detail, a good deal of the troop is away permanently. This is the first drill we've had since we were in camp last summer."

"How come so big a guard?"

"Well, the guard-house has two hundred and fifty prisoners in it, many of them serving six months or longer, and all bad eggs too. You see, Congress is economizing on the army, and we haven't funds to send our general prisoners to Leavenworth, so we have to keep them here. Once you could send out eight or nine prisoners with one guard, but not now. Two to a guard is as many as is safe."

"And this is the army we fight our next war with!" I remarked.

"You'd be in it if you could get in," said he bitterly, meaning the army, which was true enough.

After drill we went into the saddle-room. I hadn't been in a saddle-room since before the war, and I made impolite remarks.

"We have to take what they give us," said the skipper sadly. "These bits save the government about a dollar apiece. They make the horses' mouths sore, they rust, they break, and while the old bit that you and I used would last forever if it wasn't lost, these tin things have to be replaced two or three times a year. We use up half a dozen cheap bits where, if they bought us a good one in the beginning, we'd always have it."

"Don't the general staff ever say anything to Congress about this?"

"Sure they do, but that's all the good it does. If you don't hit a Congressman over the head with a vote he doesn't hear you, and the army hasn't any votes."

THE FATE OF THE *FLYING FISH*

By Robert Carse

Author of "Cockney," "The Kid," etc.

CUMULUS streamers of clouds sped before the whip of the Atlantic wind as Mr. Mac Graw sloshed down the fore deck of the *Maid of Orleans*, his watch cap cocked against his right ear, a smile of contentment irradiating his broad, sun-tanned face. Mr. Mac Graw was the chief mate of the *Maid of Orleans*—one week out from Five Fathom lightship and the Delaware, bound for Genoa and Naples with locomotives for the Italian government. Mr. Mac Graw had just come off watch, finished a good breakfast and gone forward to go over the stores and paint supply in the forepeak with his "Stores," a hulking Danish sailing-ship man.

Mr. Mac Graw was still smiling as he passed No. 2 hatch, and started down the leeward alleyway on the starboard side of the forward house. He splashed along in the wave-washed alleyway, actually grinning as the spray silted over the side and slapped him in a saline shower. Mr. Mac Graw had served his 'prentice time in a *Black Diamond* barkentine in the days when the Tyneside was filled with high-sticked clippers on the 'Frisco-Sydney run, and no man was a sailor unless he had made it around "Cape Stiff" for the Golden Gate five times. Mr. Mac Graw liked the braw snap of the October, mid-Atlantic sunshine, the salt silt of the spray, the neat, seamanly work of his storekeeper, and the way the *Maid of Orleans* slugged along through the quarterly seas. Mr. Mac Graw's heart was at ease with the world as he neared the end of the alleyway by the after break of the house. There he stopped, gaped, cursed silently but vehemently, and the radiant grin was lost in a bellicose scowl. He stood poised against a stanchion, watching the little drama being enacted on the midships deck in front of him.

Grease-smudged, khaki trousers rolled above his spindly, bowed knees, Spockers, the Cockney officers' mess-man, stood shank-deep in the waves rippling across the deck, which purled soughing and sobbing out through the deck scuppers. The little, pasty-faced Limehouse mess-man, his button of a nose reddened in the wind, perched himself precariously on a paint box and began to shine the brass rim of a port-hole deadlight in the after bulkhead of the house.

But what halted Mr. Mac Graw and dissipated his aureate mood, was the sight of his long, blackly silken cat, Serang, stalking uncomfortably up and down the tarpaulin-covered crest of No. 3 hatch, which stood like an island in the wave-slosh of the midships.

Spockers, the Cockney, as officers' mess-man, had received implicit and voluminous orders about the care, daily schedule and treatment of Serang. These, at the moment, were grossly disobeyed. The little

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"*The Fate of the* Flying Fish, *copyright, 1926, by Robert Carse.*

marmoset-faced Cockney hated the cat, the mate knew that. He had heard Spockers grumbling and cursing before at the labor and time he expended on the care of the silken feline. But Mr. Mac Graw was used to that—the grumbling—for sailors, as a rule, do not like cats. But Mr. Mac Graw did— and kept his, and saw to it in the ships that he signed in that the mess-man handled his pet like a new-born child.

Mr. Mac Graw, partially filled, it must be admitted, with good Nigger-Head Jamaica rum, was coming down the Bund in Shanghai one night, when he had seen Serang, then an unnamed and unwashed inhabitant of the jetties and fish scrap-heaps of the alleys, prowl out into the flicker of a street lantern. Mr. Mac Graw had always entertained a dormant love for big black cats, and this affection at the moment was enhanced by his recent libations of Nigger-Head rum.

He bellowed at the coolie padding along at the handles of his rickishaw to " 'vast heavin' an' lay to fer a minute."

The collie, dumbly cognizant of the baroque ways of rum-laden American mates, did so. Mr. Mac Graw leapt from the rickishaw, scooped up the cat like a half back would a bouncing football, and clambered back into the rickishaw again. That was eight years ago, and in those years Serang had come to be the idol and fetish of Mr. Mac Graw's simple, seafaring existence. Cat and mate were inseparable, ashore and afloat, and the burly chief mate had on several occasions dusted his knuckles on the chins of some of his contemporary officers who "didn't see why the blinkin' —— a chief mate had to drag a big black beggar of a Shanghai cat along with him." But Mr. Mac Graw had always summarily won his point and retained the cat.

And now! Mr. Mac Graw was rigid with repressed anger as he watched.

Spockers, the Cockney, was mumbling morose jumbles of Cheapside curses to himself as he toiled with polish and rag at the monkey work, swaying back and forth on his perilous paint box perch. Serang paced, mewing deeply in his sleek throat, back and forth on his tarpaulin domain on the angle of the hatch. Waves slatted over the wind-'ard bulwarks on the port side and lapped up near the white feet of the cat. Serang arched his back nervously and hissed back at the sibilance and swishing of the waves as they slithered around him. The mate's fingers were tensed with anger as he pushed himself along the alleyway until he stood just hidden behind the angle of the house from the toiling, murmuring Cockney.

Mr. Mac Graw was mad, mad clean through as he reviewed the manifest mutiny of the scrimy mess-man in placing his cat out on a wave-bordered hatch where he might catch a cold, fall off, drown—any number of things! As he listened to the grumbling whine of Spockers his rage mounted in a carmine flood.

"Blarsted cat!" sputtered Spockers "Blinkin' black! Tykin' all me time an' care! Mess-men ain't myde to tyke th' parts o' —— nurse mydes fer stinkin' black —— o' cats. Stri' me pink! Tykin' care o' a black beast o' a Shanghai alley cat! Me—wif me work w'y behin' an' th' stooard—blarst his eyes, th' Scots belly-robber!—allus ridin' me fer not bein' squared-up wif me work at mess time. No won'er, chysin' aroun' arter this 'ere black, slinkin' lunk o' bloody perdition! Swab o' a myte—'e t'inks I'm gonna tyke all me time to it. Heh! Yeah—an' leave th' blessed alley robber in 'is cabin t' mess an' rip aroun' like a young circus lion! Heh! Not this 'ere lad, yers trooly, Jymes Spockers, Lymuss, Lunnon. Ho—I'll tyke 'is Nibs th' cat, 'is Majesty, Serang, out t' get 'is blinkin' w'iskers cool in th' fresh mornin' airs o' th' Western Ocean. Stri' me dead if th' stoopid myte don't think I signed on t' be a —— chymber myde fer 'is w'iskered —— o' a cat! Black ——!"

SPOCKERS finished his dabbing at the brass of the deadlight and shuffled around to get down from his box, ending his mouthing undertone. Serang mewed fiercely, plaintively, as a comber swashed over the rim of the bulwarks and surged around him. The cat stood arched and nervous, the salt water coruscating his ebony back with gleaming globules of silver.

"Heh—heh! Got yer —— back wet that time, eh, 'is Nibs?" commented Spockers, cackling in his throat.

The supple, clean-limbed cat drew back as far as he could go on the rear of the minute island, poised, then scratched at the canvas as he scudded forward and dived through the air for the open passageway door beside the Cockney.

"Heh—heh! me flyin'-fish," chortled Spockers.

The ship careened as he spoke and the speeding Serang swerved in his flight to smack dully against the paint box under the mess-man. Spockers waved his arms wildly, trying desperately to maintain his balance, slid, tipped back again, then shunted over, to sprawl head foremost in the two feet of water on the deck. Serang half scrambled, half swam toward the water guard at the entrance of the passageway. Spockers, mouthing foul curses, rose to his knees, his button nose bloodied by rude contact with the deck, and clutched at the cat. He grasped the quivering animal by the nape of the neck and shook it fiercely.

"Blarst me if ye ain't content wif pl'yin' lion wif th' myte's gear in 'is cabin, but mus'' flop aroun' th' deck like a —— flyin'-fish, a-knockin' down hard-workin' mess-men. Dirty swipe o' a Hankow pig an' a Singapore rabbit! It's th' larst time ye'll be a-botherin' me! Blarsted cat!"

He swung the struggling Serang high by his tail. Murder was in the slitted eyes of Mr. Mac Graw as he plodded grimly forward in his sea-boots. The Cockney crooked his elbow, then with a final brutal shake, flung the cat overside into the burble and slosh of the seas.

"Here, here—! Mister Mac Graw, what is this? I thought that the days of castigation by officers to members of the crew were over. What's the matter, sir? What is the matter?"

The captain, a tall, florid man with a bull's horn of a white mustache draped under his nose, stood at the stern rail of his bridge, brought from his room by the thumping of blows and the frightened, snarling squawk of Spockers. Mr. Mac Graw yanked the Cockney off his feet once more and held him dangling, then swatted him squarely in the mouth, to send him catapaulting against a steel king-post. Then he looked up at the captain, his parabola of thin, sandy hair disarranged by his exertions.

"Matter—matter, sir! This here low, greasy, lascar swipe of a Limehouse stinker just flung me Serang—me cat—overside! Yes sir—flung him right overside. That, sir, as you know, is the worst sort of bad luck—means all kinds of bad breaks for the ship. And in addition—"

Mr. Mac Graw looked ruefully at his split knuckles, then at the huddled, unconscious form of the mess-man, swirled by the waves to the hatch top.

"In addition, sir, Serang was me cat, and me bunk-mate for eight long years—an' a —— good cat he was, too, sir!"

"Mr. Mac Graw, I commiserate with you," droned the captain unctuously.

The captain had aspirations of becoming port captain of the line and wished to keep in the good graces of such experienced and capable chief officers as Mr. Mac Graw, who would some day, he dreamed, be captain of a ship like the *Maid of Orleans* under him. The captain breathed loudly through his mouth, stirring the white, bristling arch of hairs at the center of his mustache.

"You are right, sir," he continued, talking in the flat monotone of a minister addressing his flock, "such an act is—a very ill omen to the success of the ship and her voyage, to say the least. I think—the—er—mess-man you have just castigated was deserving of his punishment. He is a slovenly, dirty soul, anyway. I have never seen him appear at mess in a clean jacket yet. You may use your own discretion about the disposition of his case, Mister Mac Graw. Good morning, sir!"

The captain turned and marched sedately toward the door of his cabin, leaving the simple chief mate staring upward with partially opened mouth. Sometimes the "Old Man" talked as if he had swallowed the whole set of "Books of International Culture and Knowledge" which lined the walls of his cabin. He'd given him reach-way to treat the bloody mess-man as he saw fit, though, thought Mr. Mac Graw as he booted the semi-conscious Spockers upright.

Joe, the boatswain, his sou'wester flaps turned up from his ears, came down the midships alleyway where the sailors on day watch were swabbing down the bulkheads and overhead paint work with rags and steaming soogey water. Joe halted by the port winch and grinned. Mr. Mac Graw looked at his boatswain, then slapped the Cockney alongside the head again with a vicious wallop.

"Joe, —— yer eyes, ye scrimy Cockney hound! Joe, ——!"

"Aye, aye, Mister Mac Graw."

"Joe, this here lunk just flung me cat, me Serang, overside. I seen him with me own eyes!"

"Aw no, Mate," remonstrated Joe, horror-struck at the thought of the bad luck for the ship entailed in the act.

"Aw yes, Joe" said Mr. Mac Graw, swatting with an open hand at the face of Spockers, painfully, bruisedly conscious.

"Cripes!" whispered Joe, crossing himself.

Mr. Mac Graw released his hold on the neck of Spockers' shirt and restrained him from slumping to the hatch by booting him savagely.

"Stand up—ye swab o' ——! Or I'll knock ye loose fr'm yer keel!"

The drenched, rodent-like mess-man, his hair plastered down his cocoanut forehead, limped to the king-post and leaned against it, like a prisoner in the dock awaiting the pronouncement of his sentence.

"Joe, the skipper gave me reach-way t' do whatever I want with this piece o' human shark-meat. I give 'im to you. Throw 'im all the dirty jobs ye got, Bose, an' work 'im to a frazzle. We'll show these here Limehouse tick-bugs they can't come aboard a packet an' act like that. Tha's better'n loggin' his pay—he only gets about forty bucks a month anyway. Take him aft now, Joe, an' I hate t' say it, but put him in th' focsle with th' gang. And—Joe—"

"Yes, sir, Mate?"

"Joe, be sure an' tell 'em what he did!"

"Aye, aye, sir! I sure will. Lay aft—ye bundle o' bilge. I'll boot yer spine inta yer ears! Now, make knots an' keep goin'!"

Mr. Mac Graw cursed fervently and with deep sorrow, then plunked over the water guard and into the passageway of the forward house. He pummeled at a door on the port side over which the wooden disc label read "Steward's Office." Without waiting for an answer he pushed the door open.

Mr. Naughton, the Scots steward, raised a pudgy, flaccid face from his desk. Before him lined an array of pound tobacco tins, a spoon and a piece of fly paper. Mr. Naughton, by dint of slow labor with the spoon, was eliminating from the tobacco the quantities of minute redbugs which inhabited the tins. Mr. Naughton hoped, later on in the voyage, to sell the redeemed smoking mixture to the members of the crew for "three quarters price and just as good as new."

The steward dropped a spoon load of red bugs on to the sticky surface of the fly paper and faced the mate. Mr. Mac Graw scowled at him ferociously. This rotund-bellied Scotsman was the man who had been so blind as to ship Spockers, the murderer of his cat.

"Mr. Naughton—"

The mate stopped and pulled his cap visor low on his head.

"An' what wud ye have, Mistair Mac Gr-raw?"

"None o' yer buggy tabac an' ye may wager that, sir! Yer swipe o' an officers' mess-man, Spockers, has just dropped me cat, Serang, overside. 'Tis a form of mutiny, as ye know—an' the master considers it a grave case. An' t' use his own words 'has placed th' disposition of the case in me hands.' I have sent th' swab aft inta th' deck gang, in th' gentle care o' Joe th' bosun. Take him off yer rolls an' I'll make the correct entry in me log. He's now a member of th' deck force an' in my charge—tha's all, Mister Naughton. To my way o' thinkin' it's a poor steward who would hire a cat-murderin' rascal o' a Limehouse Cockney fer a mess-man!"

To this last there was no answer, opined Mr. Naughton as he returned to his tobacco-purification and the chief mate whanged the door shut.

The men on day watch were sprawled about the deck of the forecastle enjoying their after-meal smokes when Joe, the boatswain, shoved Spockers in the door, and with the combined impetus of a boot and shove, hurled him across the deck to collapse in an empty bunk. The men looked at their boatswain with mild surprize. Joe, the boatswain, unconsciously reverting to the dramatic, leveled a paint-smirched thumb at the sobbing Cockney.

"Him—that there scum o' East India Dock Road—he's a Jonah! He's four stinkin' Jonahs rolled inta one bundle o' bilge. He—"

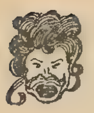
The enormity of the Cockney's deed overwhelmed the boatswain, and he stood swallowing, shaking his fist in the direction of the malefactor.

"C'me on, Bose, yer way off yer course. W'at'd he do, fer ——'s sake?" urged "Slats" Toonan.

The boatswain recovered his power of speech suddenly.

"Him—him?— He flung th' mate's cat overside!"

"*Nombre di santos!*" breathed "Grekko" Lajabourdas, where he squatted propped against his seabag.



THE others sat silent, staring at the whining, softly sobbing Cockney. In sailorman superstition there are three paramount omens or acts which presage bad luck, death and disaster; the visitation of the "ghost lights" or Saint Elmo's fire to the rigging and mast trucks of the ship; the passage to windward at sundown of that gossamer and golden-legendary square-rigger, the "Flying Dutchman"; and the disposal by one of the crew of any live animal over the side of the ship, especially a cat. Spockers, the Cockney, had unwittingly performed the last of the evil three!

Slats Toonan was the first one to find his voice again.

"Well, w'at in th' name o' —— made th' mate send 'im here wit' us? We don't want no blinkin' Jonah like him in th'— He—he flung Mac Graw's cat overboard, eh Bose?"

"Yeah, Slats. Ya see th' mate wants ta hand it to him fer what he done, so he sent 'im back aft with youse guys. All dose lousey jobs youse guys was goin' t' do once we was in th' 'Med' I'll stick on ta him, *savvy?* T'row 'im back in th' lazarette if ya don't want 'im aroun' here—them's th' mate's orders, an' none o' my bracin's.

"W'at d' ya say? Ain't it time t' turn to now an' finish up them holiday spots in th' starb'rd alley? Ye got any seaboots, there, Jonah? No—eh? Well, lay for'ard, then, an' see yer ole lord an' master, th' belly-robbin' stooard, about rationin' ya a pair outa th' slop chest. *Vamose pronto*, now!"

Joe, the boatswain, accompanied his words with a well-applied swing of his seaboot, and the slight Cockney fairly flew down the passageway and out on to the well deck. Muttering morosely to each other about this latest and most portentous happening of the voyage, the forecastle mob trailed after, buttoning up jacket and jumper necks and jerking at seaboot straps.

To the warped and bruised Cockney, the following month was a thing of miasmatic, unrelieved horror. Mate, boatswain and shipmates rode him unmercifully and constantly. As soon as the decks dried off when the *Maid of Orleans* poked into calm weather, Joe, the boatswain, put Spockers to work with deck-scraper and wire brush, to clean up the rusted places on the deck-plates. For hours in the spray-flecked sunlight of the Atlantic, he would scrub and scrape at one small plate on the main-deck, pushing the scraper at the rusty shale formed around a shackle bolt or deck cleat, the observant boatswain always hovering in the background. At five o'clock when the rest of the men on deck watch would knock off and go aft for chow, he would keep toiling on, while Mr. Mac Graw watched him from the after rail of the bridge, where he paced back and forth on watch. Dusk and purple-flooding night would finally end his work, and he would clump into the forecastle, bowed and knotted over by the pain twitching and trembling in his back and shoulder muscles.

Even the mess-boy, who had been slightly in awe of him when he was officers' messman, had learned his lesson from the forecastle gang, and would jeer and gibe at him when he sat swiftly gobbling his cold food.

The men had outlawed him from the forecastle and he had, out of necessity, made his bunk in the lazarette, or large dunnage room in the stern of the ship. Here, where old paint tins, tarpaulins and mooring lines combined to stench odoriferous odors, he had made his bunk on a pile of disused canvas life-boat covers. Right back of him, the great propellor whanged, thumped and whanged as it revolved slowly, pushing the *Maid of Orleans* on to Genoa. Topside, in the poop house, the steam steering engine clattered, slid and banged when the man at the wheel up forward in the wheel house changed his course a degree or so, then brought her nose up again.

Spockers would stretch out on his blankets in the dim, shadow-splotched place, dragging deeply at his pipe, mumbling low, horrible curses.

"Jonah—heh! Jonah, am I? No more Jonah than them stinkin' Yahn-kee swabs! Blarsted cat—blinkin' black ——! Done right t' fling 'im overside. —— myte—Hi'll give 'im 'is, I will! I'll give 'im a bit o' cold Briton steel in th' back in a Genoa alley—that's w'at! Him 'n' 'is black 'airy lunk o' perdition! Myking a lascar slyve out o' a self-respectin' British subjeck! Stri' me blind— Hi'll fix 'im!"

But Spockers' sanguinary dreams of bashing in Mr. Mac Graw had not been realized when the *Maid of Orleans* shunted down the harbor mouth, leaving gleaming, golden, red-and-white Genoa tiered on the green of the mountain astern. Joe the boatswain, his seaman's imagination revivified by contact with the gay but expensive ladies of La Café Olympia on the *Via Settembre*, had new plans evolved for his protegée. He hauled Spockers into the depths of the fore-peak paint locker the first morning out of Genoa, and introduced him to a large bucket of fish oil, black paint and more fish oil.

This, said the boatswain, although it had a bad stench, was a very successful mixture for keeping the decks from rusting. If he, Jonah, were to administer it to the deck, he would ultimately save himself much scraping and brushing at rust flakes. He then thrust the bucket handle and a large bundle of burlap rags into Spockers' hands and led him to the fore deck.

All day long in the broil of the semi-tropical sun, Spockers laboured on his hands and knees, swashing out with his oily rags at the decks, working slowly aft in his cramped posture, looking like a sadly soiled crab when seen from the rear. By sundown the blackened stretch of deck reaching from No. 2. hatch to the water break by the fore-peak scuttle, attested to his handiwork.

Since noon he had been on his hands and knees swabbing. He tried to get to his feet, his stiffened knee joints betrayed him, and he slipped headlong in the fresh oil. Mouth full of foul fish oil and black paint, his eyes crying from the smart of the stuff, he hobbled forward; slung bucket and rags down the fore-peak scuttle and went aft.

Slats Toonan stood slouched by the forecastle door when the Cockney came down the well deck ladder. The gangling sailor grinned broadly at sight of Spockers, who was a mass of black from head to foot.

"Haw, haw! Our stinkin' Jonah has gone an' painted himself up like a channel marker! Haw, haw! Where d' ya think ya are, Jonah? Down in th' firehold? Go on ya scum or I'll bust ya in th' beak!"

SPOCKERS snuffled and said nothing when he sidled by him, but Toonan eyed him suspiciously as he shuffled down the passageway. The Cockney made a sudden quick jump and spun around. Toonan was waiting for it and flung himself flat on the deck as the knife whirred over his head and out on to the well deck. The former mess-man gabbled tremulous curses of frightened, impotent rage as he scampered toward his retreat in the lazarette. Toonan's fingers grasped him by the hair of the head, swung him about, then bunched into fists which beat Spockers in to speedy insensibility.

The last fiber of moral courage snapped that night inside Spockers as he lay twisting and writhing with pain on his blankets in the lazarette. In the next two weeks, while the *Maid of Orleans* got the last of the massive locomotive parts out of her hatches in Naples, then snubbed through calmly rippling seas across the *Golfo di Napoli* to Torre di Annunziata to load rock ballast for home, Spockers entertained just one thought—to flee the ship as soon as possible. Any chance of getting physical retribution out of the mate or the crew was impossible, for they were leagued against him—"th' beastly, —— murderers o' Yahnkees."

The dainty, stream-lined tug punched the big mat on her bow against the stem of the *Maid of Orleans*, shoving the freighter back into her berth alongside the mole in Torre di Annunziata. The third mate standing on the poop howled at the two harbor brigands in possession of the ship's stern line, and they slipped it through a vast iron ring fastened in the stone and the bight was hauled aboard on a heaving line. The stern winch sputtered and hissed as it took in the slack over the winch-head.

"Stop it off—'vast heavin'!" yelled the third mate.

" 'Vast heavin', sir!" said the man at the winch handle.

"Stop it off, sir!" answered Slats Toonan, slipping the small manila stopper line over the heavy mooring hawser in two sure turns.

The other men of the after gang jumped at the turns of rope being peeled from the winch head and carried it to the big steel bitts where it was swiftly belayed. Slats Toonan cast off his stopper line, putting all the tension on the hawser. The big line creaked, groaned, and slipped tightly in to place as the last bit of slack was expended. The third mate wheeled about, cupping his hands to his lips.

"All fast aft, sir-rr!" he shouted.

"Aye aye!" echoed the captain from the bridge.

"Let run twenty-five fathoms on the starbord anchor, Mister Mac Graw!"

"Twenty-five fathoms on th' starbord anchor, sir!" came the mate's reply from the forecastle head where he stood beside the carpenter at the anchor-winch.

The after gang pulled off their heavy,

leather working gloves and clumped to the port rail of the poop to look over the harbour. Cupped within the encircling arm of the ancient stone mole, a dozen tramp steamers of Norwegian, French and Spanish registry sidled at their anchor chains; their sides clustered with groups of cargo lighters, which at a distance resembled a swarm of ants around crumbs of bread. Behind lay the smirched, ocherous jumble of the little town straddling the *Via Pompeiio,* the automobile road which runs from Naples to the ruins of Pompeii, then on to the freight villas of Amalfi and Sorrento.

Above all lowered Mont Vesuvius like a brooding, leashed giant of Stygia. From the crest of the volcano a columnar feather of smoke spired, to befog a cerulean sky, where a convoy of clouds drifted in tenuous, fleecy formation.

"The ole lady's still a-smokin' at her pipe, ain't she?" observed Slats Toonan, wiping the sweat from his forehead with his jumper sleeve.

"Cripes, lookit the yacht alongside o' us, though! Ain't she a sweetheart—*oo la la!*"

Toonan gestured downward, to point out the yacht surging at her anchors to port of the *Maid of Orleans.* Lean as a whippet; every line showing the master hand of a super-ship-designer; her slim masts and row of four stacks canted aft; a line of gold traced from her cut-water to her sharply pointed stern; the big yacht was a thing of infinite beauty to a sailor. From her gaff the red, white and blue jack of Great Britain bellied softly, and the silken house-flag of royal blue exhibited a resplendent coat of arms. A smart cedar dingey danced at her jib-boom falls amidships, and sailors in naval-looking blues and flat hats stood with folded arms along the decks.

"Lookit th' —— Limey sailors on her, will ya? Got th' name o' th' packet stenciled on th' front o' their sweaters. Can ya read it, Grekko?"

Grekko Lajabourdas leaned far out over the rail and squinted at the yacht.

"F-l-y-i-n-g—F-i-s-h" he spelled out laboriously.

"*Flyin'-Fish,* eh?" echoed Slats.

"Tha's a bad luck monnicker fer a ship, too. I don't suppose his lord an' lady cares or knows—so what th' ——! That'd be a good hooker fer our Jonah t' ship in—wonder where th' swab is?"

Spockers, from his vantage around the turn of the poop house, had seen, heard and fled.

Yes, Toonan was right—it was the sort of a ship for him to be in. A ship, more beautiful than a proud woman, even more gorgeous than Francine Benguanet, the blondine *coryphée* of the Prince Charles Music Hall in West End, who had heretofore occupied the pedestal of the essence of beauty in Spockers' mental world. Yes, and the yacht was a Britisher, with the Union Jack at her gaff, and a gold-and-red coat of arms on her house flag. She was a ship where a good British subject and mess-man would be appreciated, and not cursed and kicked around the decks by a burly, always-watchful mate. He must get ashore and talk with some of the crew, see if there was a chance to get a job aboard, which would take him away from this —— hole forever!

Spockers scuttled down the ladder and into the dimmed depths of the lazarette. He panted and mumbled broken phrases of hope to himself as he bathed in an old fire bucket, scraped off his beard in front of the forecastle mirror and donned his tight-fitting, short-trousered suit of go-ashore clothes. He stumbled up the ladder onto the lower bridge and knocked nervously on the door of the captain's office.

THE captain's white, bull horn of a mustache trembled and stirred as he handed the little Cockney half his pay. In all probability the little fellow was going to jump ship, thought the captain. Better if he did—it would be good riddance. Didn't want any Jonahs in his ship, and anyway Mr. Mac Graw had treated the little fellow pretty brutally at that.

"Yes, yes, Spockers, that's half your pay as mess-man since we left Philadelphia. Yes, yes, you still draw that pay. You're welcome, I'm sure!"

Spockers hurled himself down the ladder and made for the gangway ladder. He sped down it and jumped into the stern of one of the boats herded there by the money-seeking boatmen.

"Go-shore, *si?*" questioned the *boateo.*

"*Si, si,* go ashore—*cinca lires,*" breathed Spockers, fearfully eyeing the deck above for sight of the mate.

The *boateo* spraddled the 'midships thwart of the boat and pushed away at his oars, singing in a somber monotone to himself. Night dipped a veil of ultramarine across the sky, which swiftly deepened into black, except for the orange penumbra of the volcano crater, reflecting the light from the fiery heart within, where lava burbled, tossed and seethed.

As the *boateo* jerked past a big Spanish freighter bearing on her bow the legend "*L'Espangnola XXXVIII*," a sailor came up her forecastle-head with the anchor lantern, which he braced and hoisted aloft on the foremast halyards, to swing, blinking and yellow, twenty feet above the deck like a captive fire-fly. The *boateo* jabbered in grunting harbour jargon at Spockers, crouched in the stern, and the Cockney nodded assent.

The boat clunked gratingly against barnacle-covered stone and the *boateo* held his craft alongside the steps of the wharf with a distended oar. Spockers grudgingly handed him one of the crumpled five *lira* notes he had just received from the "Old Man," then skipped up the dock before the *boateo* could curse him for his niggardliness in not giving him a tip.

Spockers hastened up the quai, his head bent low, pockets holding his twitching hands. The odor of stale and long dead fish, of oakum and of tar, and the thousand and one taints of an Italian fishing village stormed his nostrils. Spockers sniffed and liked it, after his close contact with black paint, fish oil and winch grease during the past month. He clattered in his high-heeled shoes up a shadowy flight of age-old stone steps laid by Roman convict labour in the reign of Nero. The steps were vaulted with a moss-greened roof, and in the semi-darkness of the place a large candle flickered and quavered in a recess chiseled out of the wall, where a brightly daubed statuette of the Virgin Mary stood.

Spockers hastened up the last of the smoothly worn steps and down an alley which angled between rows of askewed stucco houses. Two or three haggard mites of urchins, wearing wooden soled shoes chased after him wailing "*una cigaretta, signor?*" to no avail. Spockers turned another corner and came into the *Via Pompeiio.* Chattering, gesticulating store keepers were busied pulling down their shop windows, and the be-aproned bakers were removing the wooden spaghetti racks from the curbs as Spockers trudged by.

A *carmota* containing a young *paysano* and his bride bowled past, the driver snapping his long, braided leather whip-lash with pistol-like reports, closely pursued by the *carmotas* holding wine-merry friends of the couple. Spockers jumped aside just in time to escape being knocked down by a wheel hub.

Mud spurned up by the horses' hoofs splattered over him and he shook his fist after the disappearing carriages and shouted—

"Blarsted Eyetalians—t'rowin' mud on a' honest Briton pee-destriun! Wild wif wine an' thoughts o' love an' no care fer th' ones which has t' go afoot!"

"That's right, sir! That's right. They should take more care in these narrow streets of ours, eh, mate? Daily the fresh spaghetti is covered with mud from their tires!" came a soft voice in English.

Spockers, occupied in brushing the mud from the serge of his suit, looked up. A short, stocky individual, wearing a blue cloth watch cap and a square box coat of seafaring design, stood in the door of a little shop beside Spockers. The Cockney surveyed him slowly. The other winked widely and pointed a finger to the legend scrolled in faded gilt on the glass fan-light over the door.

"Guilliamo Giorcini, that's me! A ship chandler, sir, and a friend of the wandering sailorman. Former sailor myself, sir. Aye! Eight years steward in the Lloyd Sabaudo Line. Come in, sir, and have a drink! A Briton, if I ain't mistaken? That's right, sir. Sit right over there!"

The small, dingy interior of the shop was empty of customers. Spockers dropped down on to the indicated chair before an iron table. The ship chandler slipped into a chair across the table from his guest and clapped his hands. A blinking crone poked her head through the curtains obscuring a door in the rear.

"Some cognac—some of our very best cognac for the signor, Maria! I'm sorry, sir, that I can not give you whisky as you desire, but the sharpers in the Quirinal at Rome impose such a high tax that it is impossible to sell it to such poor men as us. What ship are you out of, sir? Oh, the American freighter which dropped anchor this afternoon. You like that brandy? Have one on me, sir. No—ah, no. *Mia bellissima,* Maria, has refused me it. You know a sailor and his rum! Ha ha! No, I stick to *vino bianci.* A woman's drink at best, but it must do for me."

SPOCKERS had several "on" the ship chandler, who poked a small copper brazier containing smoldering embers of olive wood closer to the table to drive off the chill of the place. The ship chandler handed the Cockney a clay-bowled pipe with a long wooden stem, and nudged the cognac bottle nearer the other's elbow. Spockers sat with his gray hat poked up on the cone of his skull, stained teeth on the pipe-stem, hungry, glinting eyes fixed on the amber of the cognac in the glass before him. Giorcini, the ship chandler, cocked an examining glance at him.

About four more drinks before he would become communicative and malleable, judged the ship chandler, measuring the cognac in the bottle, and the pin-pricks of light in the faded eyes of the Cockney. The ship chandler rested his chin on his hand, staring at the pile of old tackle, deck gear and hawsers which filled the other end of his shop and made good the camouflage title of "ship chandler," which disguised a dozen nefarious forms of thievery and law-breaking.

Guilliamo Giorcini spoke softly, his eyes still on the rusted flukes of a kedge anchor.

"You say, Mr. Sp-r-rockers, that you don't like the dirty American swine and the way they have been treating you?"

The hissed words were freighted with hidden suggestion. Spockers scorched his gullet with the cognac in the tumbler.

"Don't like?" he barked.

"I—so stri' me dead! I—hytes 'em—hytes 'em—loathes 'em like leprosy! Brute av a mate, a-struttin' up an' down 'is decks, a-cloutin' an' a-biffin' me like a rugby ball. Curse 'im an' all 'is ship's comp'ny!"

By his own characterization the ship chandler was a former sailor. He crossed himself speedily. The malevolent, deep-rooted hatred of this scrawny Jonah impressed even him. Fertile soil in which to grow *lira* notes, though, he mused, filling the other's glass and pushing the packet of coarse Italian tobacco over to him. His eyes had the furtive yearning of a fox stalking a chicken roost as he faced Spockers.

"You would like then, Signor Sp-r-rockers—to—jump the American ship—? Leave her?"

Spockers' lips untwisted from their scowl of hatred and gripped into a maudlin grin of hope. He gargled unintelligible words in his throat, but his eyes gave full affirmation. Guilliamo Giorcini's face was close to Spockers' as he spoke.

"You understand, Signor Sp-r-rockers, that such an act is against the law—that the *caribineri*—curse them!—would delight in jailing me—and you—for scheming such desertion? You do? Good, then. You have seen the English yacht in the harbor. Ain't she a beauty, sir, the *Inglesi* packet? How would you like to ship in her? Easily, sir, easily!"

At the thought of being in that graceful, slim marvel of steel and wood, under the Union Jack of Britain, in the service of a real Lord and Lady owning a blue and golden house-flag with an emblazoned coat of arms, Spockers had leapt to his feet and shouted with joy. The rest was easy now, ruminated the ship chandler, pulling the Cockney back to his seat. Guilliamo Giorcini continued in a loud whisper.

"The steward of the yacht, a keen, intelligent man, who knows what a former sailor—and a judge of the *caribineri* can do in a strange land—is a friend of mine. His Lordship has forced my friend the steward to discharge and send back to England a mess-man in his crew who was—paying too much attention to her Ladyship's French maid, so I have been told. If—the right force was brought on the steward, my friend, he might take you in the place of the man he was forced to discharge and ship home. Could you—ah—give me—say *due cento lires*, two hundred *lira*, only a few dollars—for my services in arranging it?"

"When?" gulped Spockers, dumping the contents of his pockets on the table.

"Tomorrow morning," replied Guilliamo Giorcini, folding up ten twenty *lira* notes which he had plucked from the pitiful heap on the table.

"Cripes!" sighed Spockers, lurching to his feet.

"Come back tomorrow night, at seven o'clock—six bells— and I will have it arranged for you. Do not have any fear about gear, the steward, my friend, will supply you those. It is better to take no chances and remain free from the hands of the *caribineri*. I am told that the prison in Napoli is very damp and unsanitary."

Spockers wobbled for the door, breathing ecstatically.

"Here, sir, you will need this for boat fare," said the ship chandler, holding out the last ten *lira* note on the table to Spockers.

"I will see you here at seven tomorrow night, then, sir? Good, good! *À rivederci, signor!*"

"Goo' night, mytey," gibbered Spockers gratefully.

Spockers, at the boatswain's insistence, spent his last day aboard the *Maid of Orleans* in the bilge boxes at the bottom of No. 1. hatch. Two trips before the ship had carried a cargo of grain, followed by a voyage in which the forward hatches had contained barrels of New Orleans molasses, consigned for the stomachs of the residents of the British Isles. Part of the molasses never reached the British Isles, because, due to bad stowing by the stevedore boss, several of the big kegs had been smashed in during the rough Atlantic passage. The thick fluid had seeped in time into the bilges, where it had mixed in a glutinous, foul-smelling mixture with the loose grain which had sifted to the bowels of the ship.

Knotted up in the narrow confines of the bilge boxes, Spockers toiled by the aid of a cargo lamp let down through a deck ventilator, scraping with a tin coal shovel at the fœtid mess. By five o'clock his hatred for the *Maid of Orleans* had attained the heat of molten metal. He belayed bucket and shovel on to the dangling end of a heaving line with a "farmers' knot," and swarmed up the steel ladders through the 'tween decks like a slimy harbor rat creeping along a mooring hawser.

He invaded the forecastle wash room with his dented fire bucket and scoured himself clean. As he teetered with both feet in his bucket, swabbing at himself with a piece of clean waste, he growled and sputtered in a savage sotto voce to himself. Slats Toonan, standing at the mirror with turpentine-soaked rag uplifted to get the paint spots off his neck, glanced around at him.

"What th' —— ye grousin' about now, ye sand lizard? Hey? Pipe up or I'll plank that fire bucket on yer dome like a derby hat! What! Ye ain't kiddin' are ye, Jonah? Jumpin' ship—yeah! Yeah! Yer right —— s' help me! I wont tell er try t' stop ya. Hey, Grekko—ya hear that? Our bilge-divin', deck-oilin' Jonah is gonna shove off —go on th' beach—jump th' hooker! Gawd bless ya, Jonah! Yer about as much good as a broken leg an' four doses o' China Sea scurvy. Hit th' deck an' be goin'! I won't bust any ribs tryin' t' stop ya—ye can tell that t' —— King George w'en ye have scoffings an' tea wit' him next. Attaboy! That's th' best news since we lost th' strike!"

Bewildered and dazed by their sudden change in attitude, Spockers joined with them in the mess room where they toasted him in tin cups brimming "Green Stripe" whisky. Slats Toonan even slipped forward and hired a *boateo* for the departing Jonah. He acted as a lookout for appearance of the mate when Spockers at last drudged down the deck he had so painfully painted, turned for a last look at the ship from the gangway ladder head, then ran down to spring into the stern of the rowboat waiting for him. Back aft in the forecastle Slats Toonan and Grekko Lajabourdas got gloriously inebriated on the "Green Stripe," celebrating the departure of the Cockney Jonah from the ship.

True to his words, Guilliamo Giorcini met Spockers in his little shop on the *Via Pompeiio*, and before ten that night the Cockney was shipped as a deck mess-man aboard the steam yacht *Flying-Fish*, of London. While his boatman rowed him ashore from the yacht through the dip and rustle of the harbor swells, the ship chandler experienced a few qualms of regret. He had just handed "his friend, the steward" of the *Flying-Fish*, one of the best deep sea Jonahs he as a ship chandler, smuggler, sailor and small-scope crimp had ever come across. But the little, white-faced Cockney had been on the point of suicide when he had met him.

After all, superstitions of the sea were old-fashioned, reflected Guilliamo Giorcini, and two hundred *lires* in post-war Italy under the grip of the Fascisti Dictator Mussolini were a great deal of money to a poor, struggling peddler of second-hand stores and third-rate men.

SLATS TOONAN slouched on the bridge of the *Maid of Orleans* the next day, splicing new stoppers on the canvas bridge dodger when he saw Mr. Mac Graw's binoculars on the window sill inside the wheelhouse. He slipped inside, grasped the glasses and leaned against the angle of the bridge-wing. He pressed the binoculars to his eyes and scrutinized the lazily bucking yacht lying to port. He ran his eyes along the decks and stopped when he picked up a slight, white-jacketed figure shining at the brass of a cabin skylight. The man in the white jacket working at the brass on the deck of the *Flying-Fish* was "Jonah" Spockers!

"——!" gasped Slats Toonan, almost dropping Mr. Mac Graw's Zeiss binoculars.

Toonan galloped down the bridge ladder and up the starboard alleyway to the fore deck where the boatswain and the rest of the men were chocking the booms in their big wooden cradles preparatory to shoving off that night. Toonan grasped Joe, the boatswain, by the arm and jerked him to the port rail. Slat's voice was hoarse with emotion.

"Joe, th' —— Jonah jumped us last night an' I jus' made him out through the mate's glasses from the bridge, standin' over there on th' deck o' th' limejuice yacht! Joe—think o' a Jonah—a real *muy malo* Jonah like that, in a packet with th' name o' *Flyin-Fish!* S' help me, I'm watchin' fer her t' sink any minute at her anchor chains! An' us pullin' out t'night, too! Us—we're ridin' in ace-high luck—but them poor *hombres*, sure as I'm a-standin' here, ain't never gonna see Lunnon again. No sir—not with a bad-luck cat Jonah like him—an' a worse luck monnicker like that o' *Flyin'-Fish.* They ain't got no more chance than a hunk o' ice in a coal passer's jumper! Good night!"

Joe, the boatswain, inclined his head gravely in acceptance of the other's expressions of fear.

"Yeah, she pulls out t'night, too—bound fer Monaco. One o' th' *boateos* at th' gangway peddlin' *vino russe* tole me. Yer right, Slats—she's sure in fer bad luck. An' it's us who's got th' topside luck, too! Fer we ain't got him aboard. I ain't slep' with me dungarees off since he threw th' mate's cat overboard!"

Joe, the boatswain, addressed himself to his gang, who were loafing on the hatch tops, waiting for orders.

"C'me on, ye bunch o' farmers. Lay aft an' we'll get th' tarps an' battens on them after hatches, th' stevedores is done loadin' rock inta her. Slats, you an' Grekko take th' two ordinaries an' get th' gangway ladder inboard, will ya?"

Dusk palled the sky with leaden, oppressive darkness, hazing into the same dun shade as the belch of smoke billows lifting in gaseous masses from Vesuvia. In the heart of the volcano, titanic rumblings echoed, re-echoed, to boom across the lisping, blue-black metal of the sea. Sparks spattered upward from the crater, stinging with flashes of flame at the clouds shrouding the slopes. Then, with the thundering of a colossal Cerberus, lava spewed, molten and slowly moving, over the cinder rim of the crater and laved down the mountainside toward the handful of little, whitewashed houses among the olive groves on the lower slopes.

The crews on the tugs which came out from Torre di Annunziata to take the *Flying-Fish* and the wallowing, blunt-bowed cargo ship out to sea, were white and shivering with fear.

"Them guys knows what it means when th' ole lady t'rows away her pipe an' begins t' belch an' spit," commented Slats Toonan as he stuck out the stern tug-line through a Panama chock.

Aboard the yacht the slow-moving, serious sailors in their natty uniforms padded about the decks, securing the anchors high against her lean bows and slipping steel plates used as wave guards over the big windows in the deck houses.

"Dat Limey skipper ain't any land-sailor, y' can see that—even though his buckoes moves about like a bunch o' schoolmarms back home. He knows he's in fer a blow an' don't ye forget it. 'Is Lordship must be in a —— of a hurry t' get t' Monte Carlo an' blow his *argent* or he'd never have him take her out on a night like this 'un. See them wave guards on th' winda ports? —— help him, though—wit' that cat-throwin' Jonah aboard!"

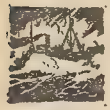
Mr. Mac Graw's whistle shrilled from the bridge, and Slats, who was on watch, finished lashing the patent log clock to the poop taffrail and ran forward. The fat little pilot was going over the side as Slats loped past.

"Goin' t' blow like ——, eh, *Signor Pilote?*" yelled Slats.

"*Si, si*, it's going to blow ver' ver' hard!" puffed the pilot, disappearing down the ladder toward his waiting motor launch.

"Get th' boatswain an' tell him to put Spanish windlasses on all th' hatches an' to lash the boats an' gripe 'em inboard—an' t' drive them batten rods and wedges solid inta th' cleats. Tell 'im t' make everythin' ship-shape—we're goin' inta a buster. Then get along aft an' bring in that log an' line—we won't need that *bêbe* tonight. Get along up here on th' bridge, then, Toonan, I'll need ya here!"

Mr. Mac Graw shouted his orders as he made fast the chin strap of his sou'-wester, then started belaying the new manila stoppers of the canvas bridge dodger tight to the awning stanchions. Warm, moist and heavy, the wind smarted off the starboard quarter, purling and sighing like air released from a blast furnace. By the time the men had the last hulking steel life-boat griped inboard and lashed firmly to the davits with inch-and-a-half line, the waves were smashing over the 'midships bulwarks and foaming in solid crests across the decks.



A NIGHT of black terror to the men on the bridge of the *Maid of Orleans*. A night when the life-boats washed away in broken sticks of kindling, gripes, falls, lashings and all. A night when, within an hour, twelve ships sank around her as she battered for headway in the breasting, howling gale off Sardinia and Corsica.

Eight bells chattered from the wheel house chronometer in the moan and tremulo shrieking of the ripping, tearing seas. Sparks, the wireless operator, splashed out of the wireless shack, ear phones still on his head, and pushed over to where Mr. Mac Graw and Toonan crouched, made fast to the bridge stanchions. Sparks pressed his nose against Mr. Mac Graw's ear as he screamed—

"Limey yacht, the *Flying-Fish*, going down within a thousand fathoms of us—off the port bow, about two points. Just sent her last S.O.S. now. We can't do nothin' for 'em, can we? Aye, aye, mate! My aerial is still good somehow!"

Toonan trembled with uncontrollable ague beside the mate. He pulled Mr. Mac Graw's head down to his and howled—

"Our Jonah—Spockers—him who t'rew yer cat overside— He's aboard that there *Flyin'-Fish*—her with th' bad luck name—her tha's goin' down now."

"Aw no, Slats!"

Mr. Mac Graw's answer was a rasping, curt prayer, the prayer of a sailor for a fine, keen ship of stout steel and wood.

"Aw, yes, mate!"

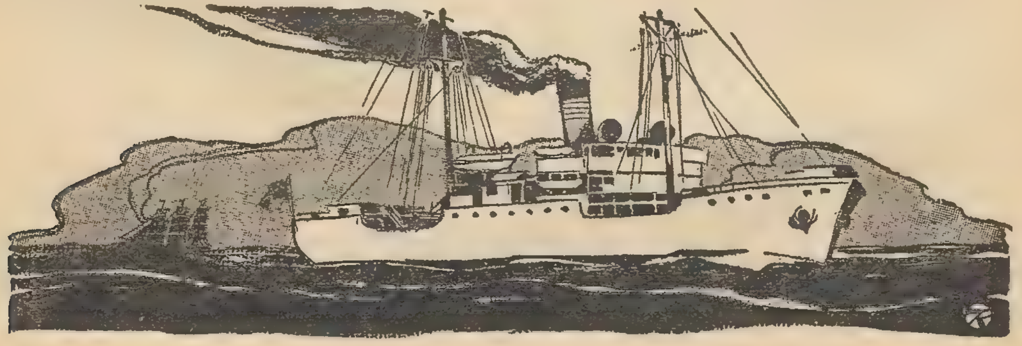
Crackling and sissing through the cloud scud of black swooping over the mast trucks, a sheet of lightning stabbed downward at the heart of the mountaining sea. Both men stared off instinctively to port, where the wireless operator had reported the doomed *Flying-Fish*. In the sputter and sheering radiance of the lightning they made out the low-lying black hull of the yacht, careened on her side until her brass keel-sheathing showed. She reared her head up once more to buck at the gnashing teeth of a monster comber. The wave torrented down her decks, flinging at the last fragments of the deck houses, the shell of her bridge and the ragged stubs of her masts, then tornadoed over the sharp stern and was gone. Blackness blotted a screen across the wave fury. Once more the lightning riveted down through the clouds, bringing hissing, slatting rain.

Mr. Mac Graw and Toonan gaped in the direction of the *Flying-Fish*. Only the snapped tops of her masts and her destroyer bow stood clear from the maelstrom of seas. Boiling and racing madly, a giant roller breasted over. The *Flying-Fish* upthrust a broken, shattered bow to the reaching spray fingers, shuddered, rolled, shunted her propellers high, then slipped downward as the lightning slithered out.

"Jonah—Jonah—our Jonah—done that. Threw me Serang overside, he did—Serang, me Shanghai cat."

"Proud—proud to th' last she was—proud—proud. What a ship!"

"Proud!"



LOG CABIN MEN

A Five-Part Story · Part I

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Border Breed," "Pards," etc.

FOREWORD

AFTER twenty years of comparative peace the Royal Masters were at it again. It would have been difficult for many of the settlers along the North American frontiers to explain what the War of the Austrian Succession was all about. European news was regularly brought by packet ships to the coast cities, but isolated communities had small knowledge of overseas events. When Prussian Frederic in 1741 paved the way for the bloody business, beginning in 1744, by his seizure of Silesia, there were very few in the New World who could foresee the howling packs of Abnaki and other Indian tribes devastating New England's borders. And yet experience had taught many that whenever the sword was rattled in England or unsheathed in France, the metallic echo was sure to resound through the ancient forests of the colonies.

Unfortunately the Peace of Utrecht failed to settle the northern boundary disputes, and there remained the old ill-feeling and distrust between Canada and the English colonies. But twenty years had passed since Queen Anne's War, a sufficient period of time for borderers to grow up who knew little of the cunning and savagery of their red neighbors. When the French king declared war on George of England in 1744, the news reached Louisburg, the only French naval station on the Atlantic coast, several weeks before it was known in Boston and New York.

With nearly all of Europe embroiled, and there being a surplusage of actors, it became necessary to enlarge the theater, and Louisburg was utilized, as were the frontiers of New England from Penobscot Bay to the settlements west of the Connecticut in New Hampshire and Massachusetts and on the upper Hudson within sight of Albany. Once again the long house of the Iroquois protected the New York settlements with the exception of the Saratoga country.

Upper New Hampshire and what is now Vermont were unsettled, while in the district of Maine the towering wilderness stretched from the Great Lake of the Sokoki* across to the Androscoggin and the Kennebec. In these ancient forests there were no white cabins. The straggling settlements kept close to the coast, their backs to the ocean. Oswego, New York, marked the western advance of the provincials, and consisted of a stone trading-house and fort, built at the insistence and with the financial aid of Governor Burnet, whose estate was owed fifty-six pounds by the sluggish Albany assembly years after his death.

Oswego was answered by a French post at Toronto, which was to intercept Indian trade bound for the more profitable English markets. The French also were posted at Niagara, and to thoroughly establish a

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*Sebago.

"Log Cabin Men," copyright, 1926, by Hugh Pendexter.

trade blockade on Lake Ontario they added two armed vessels. And there was the strong French fort at Chambly on the Richelieu which, with Fort Frederic on Champlain, covered Montreal from attacks.

Numerically the provincials could have erased Canada from the map as a French possession. This preponderance of strength was offset by sectional strife, lack of concerted action between the colonies and the inability of royal governors to act on their own initiative in the time of crises.

Canada was ever quick to take advantage of these colonial bickerings. Fort Frederic was established at Scalp Point, known as Crown Point by the provincials, while the colonies were bothering with each other over boundary lines. Canada's initial effort to secure this foothold on Champlain was stopped by Massachusetts in 1725. But six years later, while Massachusetts was disputing with New Hampshire and while New York was busy quarreling with its governor and the province of New Jersey, the fortress was built—to remain a sad menace for many a year.

When a fisherman sailed into Boston harbor and reported seeing the flames of burning Canseau, the little English fishing station across the strait from Louisburg on Cape Breton, there was a rare alarm in the north. The southern colonies felt themselves immune and were loath to take any action. It was obvious that the brunt of any invasion must be borne by northern New England and the narrow area at the heads of the Hudson. Governor Shirley of Massachusetts, the outstanding figure of the war as carried on in America, took the lead in activity and daring. Benning Wentworth, governor of New Hampshire, somewhat pompous and somewhat vain, heeded Shirley's call for help in the Louisburg expedition. Connecticut responded. Rhode Island, still remembering Roger Williams' treatment at the hands of the Puritans, nursed a grievance against Massachusetts, but did vote a hundred and fifty men; then reconsidered on learning the expedition had not been suggested by the Crown nor, as yet, approved by it. Benjamin Franklin scoffed at the idea that such a mighty fortress, twenty-five years in the building and costing millions of pounds, could be captured by a raw army of farmers, clerks and fishermen.

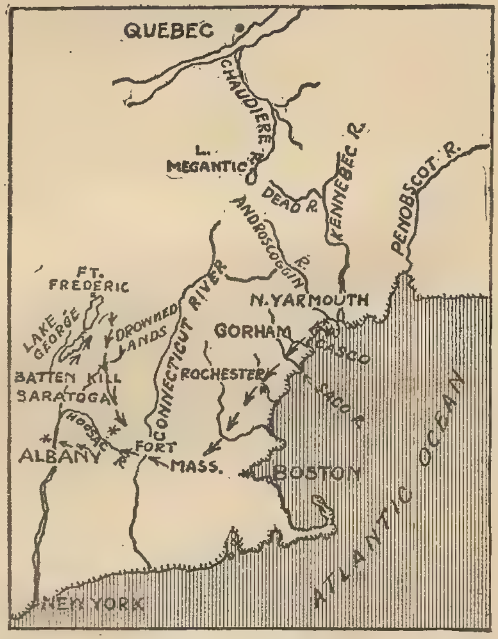
Yet Louisburg was captured by the land forces from New England. When William Tufts, the eighteen-year-old boy from Medford, climbed the flagstaff of the royal battery and made fast his red coat for a flag, there blazed forth the spirit which in another thirty years would be recognized as America.

William Vaughan of Damariscotta, generally credited with proposing the expedition, captured this important defense and wrote to Colonel William Pepperrell:

> May it please your Honour to be informed that by the grace of God and the courage of thirteen men, I entered the Royal Battery about nine o'clock and am waiting for reinforcements and a flag.

Here flashed the indomitable will which was to characterize Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, Saratoga and Yorktown. Here was something for Royal Masters to make a note of.

Massachusetts, although insolvent and still owing for King Philip's War, took the lead throughout the war. Governor Clinton of New York had his hands tied by a hostile assembly. He scolded and he pleaded, and was balked almost at every turn. He accused the Albany traders with seeking to maintain a despicable neutrality with Canada to enhance trade profits. He charged them with having grown fat through barter with the French Indians in



Queen Anne's War and with outfitting them for raids on New England and with buying from them the spoils they brought back from the eastern settlements.

Until this war the French had possessed a great advantage in having men who could hold the red tribes as allies of France. Daniel de Joncaire-Chabert, son of Joncaire, the elder, was a master at this game of red intrigue, and spent much time in the Seneca villages. He held their friendship and kept them neutral. He had no rival until 1744 when William Johnson, an adopted son of the Mohawks and ranked as a war-chief among them, displayed his ability as a leader. For the first time during the many rivalries for the Iroquois allegiance the French met their master. If Joncaire had been a thorn in the flesh of the English for years, so now was Johnson "of the Mohawk country" to repeatedly checkmate Canada. And all this while being hindered and hampered by a sullen assembly. It was enough for Albany to know he was appointed by Clinton. He was even denied the presents absolutely necessary to hold the Iroquois' favor.

The capture of Louisburg in 1745 caused delirious joy and much amazement. The following year brought great fear to Canada; for Shirley now proposed an invasion to capture Quebec, Montreal and Three Rivers, and royal governors were willing to share in the glory. The Pennsylvania assembly, controlled by Quakers, noncombatants, refused to vote either men or money, but a popular movement raised four hundred men. Other colonies raised levies and promised provisions and munitions. Governor Clinton, eager to do his share and more, continued the unequal struggle with the hostile assembly. The third year of the war opened with the stage cleared for bloody border fighting.

CHAPTER I

GOOD HUNTING

THE settlers of North Yarmouth in the district of Maine were up with the sun on this gracious June morning in 1746. Their few cabins were scattered through the clearing. Centrally located was the garrison house, surrounded by a stout stockade. This was the common refuge in case of an Indian attack. At sunrise the only evidences of life in the little settlement was the smoke from a cabin chimney and from the house inside the stockade. If not for these two signs of breakfast fires, one might have assumed the place had been abandoned. And if not for the stockade, a stranger might have accepted the rude habitations as so many Abnaki log huts, except that the rude chimneys suggested the white man.

The sun was wholly above the forest horizon before there was any signs of life aside from the pale blue pencils of smoke. Then the stockade gate was opened wide enough to permit the egress of four large dogs. From the door of the cabin emerged a fifth dog. Then gate and door were closed, and the slamming down of heavy bars sounded loudly.

The dogs, descended from forebears who learned their lessons in Queen Anne's and King William's wars, made no noise. None barked. All sniffed the air and glared at the surrounding forest wall. Then the five intelligent animals scattered and slowly made for different points of the woods. Each log and stump in the clearing was reconnoitered by testing the air for the hated taint. On reaching the woods the four-footed scouts found nothing suspicious, and they entered the growth and continued their investigations. Sharp eyes had watched them, and both stockade and cabin knew none of the Abnaki were near. The stout shutter, blocking the cabin window, was removed, and the face of a woman, crowned with a mass of fiery red hair, appeared. A dog trotted from the woods and proceeded to dig up a bone. The stockade gate swung open and men and women and children hurried to their cabins to prepare the meager breakfast.

The red-headed woman, barefoot, stepped outside and shrilly called—

"You, Reuben! Come 'n' eat your porridge."

A little boy ran from the stockade, shrilly announcing:

"Mister Greeley give me my breakfus. My father come yet?"

A spasm of pain twitched the woman's lips.

"The notion of Mister Greeley bothering with you, Two-pence. Now you must put the flower out'n the sun and give it a mite of water. You know it's going to be master pretty."

"Father come yet?"

"Land of Goshen! Of course not, child. Give him time. He'll come by'n by."

"Injuns took him," murmured the boy, his lips quivering.

"And he's living high in Canada now. He ain't eating porridge. He's having meat and milk. But that won't hold him. He'd rather come home than have best victuals ever was. Probably on the way home now. Now fetch out the plant. We want it growing good and strong when he comes back."

The boy, sober of face, entered the cabin and quickly returned with a battered tin dish filled with earth and containing a sturdy bit of Dyer's weed or woad-waxen which, in another month, would be carpeting the rocky lands around Lynn, Salem and other Massachusetts towns with its lively yellow bloom. There was scant floral beauty in the thickly forested areas of Maine. Women coming to the district from Massachusetts often brought potted slips, just as their mothers had brought them to Massachusetts from old England.

The woman secured an ax and began cutting up a log into four-foot lengths near where the boy was sitting. She was a widow. Her husband went into the woods to find a stray cow and never returned. The little boy's father, a year back, had started for Falmouth and was never seen again. The woman assiduously encouraged the belief that the missing man had been taken prisoner and was now awaiting to be exchanged or to escape.

The woman was a forceful type, and possessed the strength of a strong man as shown by her expertness in cutting up the big log. That she was unafraid was suggested by her insistence on sleeping in her cabin when all the rest of the settlement was strongly forted. The other women envied her for her forethought in having her husband build the cabin around the smooth stump of a five-foot tree, thereby providing her with the best table in the settlement. There was no doubt in her mind as to her husband's fate, now that three years had passed. And Philip Greeley appealed to her as a worthy successor of the missing man.

"So Mister Greeley fed you your breakfast, did he?" she remarked.

The boy did not hear her for he made no answer. With the precious dish of weeds on his bare knees he stared steadily toward the north. At times his small mouth worked convulsively as border breeding had to fight to prevent a display of weakness. There were old men who had never seen the time when the menace of a red war was not over the New England country. And little children were familiar with the mystery of death. They were taken to funerals as they were taken to hear the preacher. Where there were books they read about death. Frontier victims of violence were brought in from the woods; and many passed through the siege and capture of garrison or settlement. But the boy with the weeds could not keep his small mind off his father. So he stared into the north where, somewhere far away, was that Canada whither those fortunate enough to be taken prisoners were ever being hurried by their red captors.

There was a hushed air as the men gathered in a knot. They talked in low tones. Two small boys and a little girl stood close to the group, all ears. One youngster breathlessly whispered—

"They're going on a scout after the Injuns."

"They ain't," contradicted the little girl. "It's a buryin'. Some one's got to take Joseph Sweat to New Casco."

"I see him when they fetched him in," boasted the second boy. "My father says he'd 'a' liked to 'a' been near when the Injuns jumped him. He'd killed 'em."

Sweat had been killed near Blanchard's house the day before by Indians just as he was about to enter the settlement from the Falmouth path. At that moment his remains were inside the stockade. An old man with a shining bald head and a luxuriant white beard harshly announced:

"Then that's settled. We'll have prayers at the fort. Then three of you will take a hoss and start with him. Greeley trailed the Injuns far enough to the east yesterday to know they ain't near here."

THE group scattered to eat the scanty morning meal. Greeley took the dogs and sent them into the woods at different points, although none believed the savages were within striking distance. Three women joined the woman who was cutting the log, and the four, hungry for talk, were soon making up for the hours of enforced silence. One complained:

"So long as the Injuns pester us my man can't even git candle-wood enough. I hope I'll live to see the day when we can keep beef critters so's we can have taller candles."

"If the Injuns would go back to the French and stay there, the men folks could go hunting without being killed and sculped and we could make our candles out of deer suet 'n moose fat 'n bear grease," chimed in a second.

"Down Falmouth way they say one woman makes 'em out of bay-berries. But they cost more'n taller. Guess we'll have to put up with candle-wood till better times come."

The red-headed woman informed:

"The new man, Burnham, was telling last night that Massachusetts and New York folks are using wax candles, which I say is a shameful sin and waste."

"And he said the Germans down in Pennsylvania have stoves for heating. Think of a body being able to keep warm in winter! That'd be my notion of heaven."

"Shame on you!" sternly rebuked the red-headed woman. Then fiercely, "But my notion of hell is a place where all Injuns go to."

One of the women glanced at the little boy in the doorway and whispered:

"He'll never see his pa. He'll never come back."

"He will! He'll have to!" savagely replied she of the fiery hair. "I'd come if I was dead if that poor unfortinit was waiting for me. The child's faith will fetch him back, no matter where he is. And it's no great work to escape from Canada."

"Lor' Martha! What would Parson Smith of Falmouth say if he heard that talk?"

The conversation was interrupted by the little girl announcing—

"They're going to start the buryin'!"

This as the men left their cabins and made for the stockade. The women trailed after them. Martha of the red head grasped the ax in one hand and extended the other to the little boy and told him to put the dish of weeds down and accompany her. He clutched the woad-waxen, the woman called it "broom," and continued staring toward the northern skyline.

"You trot along with me, Reuben. There'll be nice prayers."

He did not appear to hear her and she started to enforce her command, then saw big tears rolling down his small cheeks. Instantly she was all gentleness. She dropped the ax and cuddled him in her arms, and with blue-green fires blazing in her eyes she hoarsely told him:

"We'll stay out here in the sunshine, little Reuben, and talk about your pa. Lor's land! Think of us eating porridge and him gitting fat in Canada. Something tells me he'll have roast goose for dinner. And won't he have a lot to tell when he comes back!"

"Last night when that new man come I—I thought it was him," whispered the boy, his voice choked and his small face working convulsively as he fought to be brave.

"He's waiting for a good chance. And he's eating off the top shelf. He'll be so fat from good living we'll laugh at him."

"They killed Joseph Sweat."

"Well, they won't hurt your pa," she insisted.

And with his face pressed to her ample bosom, she sent her hate against the French and Indians; and Christian Mohawk or ferocious Micmac would have passed her by to attack a less dangerous foe.

They became silent, she petting him. But her terrible eyes refused to soften even when following the figure of Greeley still keeping the dogs at their work. The forest had swallowed her man. She knew she was a widow, yet never a proof was forthcoming except the continued absence of her mate. She hated the French, the Indians and the forests.

Twenty years of peace had allowed a crop of children to become men and women without learning the frontier cunning of warfare. They had learned woodcraft, but not until the outbreak of King George's War had they been called upon to match wits with hostile savages. There were among them older men who had never forgotten the cruel lessons taught by Queen Anne's War, when every settlement east of the Saco was wiped out. But none had lost their inherited stubbornness. None had thought of abandoning their homes and rough fields. For two years they had withstood the terrible pressure as the French, jealous of the spreading settlements, hurled band after band of red raiders upon them.

Prayers for Joseph Sweat were concluded, and three men with a blanket-muffled burden on a horse came from the stockade and disappeared into the Falmouth path. The women set about their few household tasks while the men went to their small patches of corn.

Joshua Dresser sat down on a log in the sun. He had no kith and was free to go and come as he would, but he had displayed no inclination to leave the settlement. Poor Sweat was on his way to his last resting place. The men conveying his remains might be killed. Falmouth was a much larger settlement, yet North Yarmouth people had not sought refuge there. This carrying on of husbandry under daily menace of a massacre might have suggested to a European a strange apathy. Much like cattle feeding in the presence of the butcher.

Yet neither North Yarmouth people nor any on the frontiers of the district of Maine, New Hampshire, or Massachusetts were fatalists or dullards. Crops must be raised. For outlying settlers to fall back on a seashore settlement meant reduced rations for all, often semi-starvation. A community must be self supporting. The Indians had struck the Maine border early in the preceding summer. With no warning they fell on Damariscotta, Sheepscot, Topsham, New Meadows, Gorhamtown and Windham. Wherever they attacked, the sinister ruddy glow at night and the pall of smoke by day heralded far and wide their coming. Always killing and burning. From the Penobscot to and beyond the Piscataqua there was no safety anywhere. Little children learned to sweep the horizon each morning for the tell-tale pillars of smoke, to scan the evening heavens before going to sleep for the horrible crimson light.

"They're out over Windham way," or "They're burning over Brunswick way," the head of the little cabin would decide as he located the source of smoke or glare. Then they went to bed with death within a few miles. And the marvel of it all they slept although an ax crashing through their doors might awaken them. Men and women and children brought up in this terrible environment must ever differ from those fortunate ones who never know midnight alarms and daily ambuscades.

FOR years the Sokoki tribe of the powerful Abnaki confederacy had lived on friendly terms with the settlers in the southwestern part of Maine. They were personally acquainted with the occupants of each cabin and thoroughly familiar with the habits and customs of the people. They early learned the insistence of the whites in attending church, and many were killed going to and from worship. With war these old friendly relations were quickly altered, and the red man, who had often sought shelter from storm or cold before a white fire, was prompt to utilize his knowledge in an endeavor to burn that cabin, to kill or capture that old acquaintance.

West of the Sokoki's holdings in the valley of the Saco were their kinsmen, the Pequawkets on the fair New Hampshire meadows along the wonderous wall of the White Mountains. This tribe was ferociously turned to war. Ever since Captain Jabez Bradbury, commanding at Fort St. Georges*, sent an express to Falmouth in the summer of 1745 with the long expected and terrifying news that the Indians were out, only the winter snows had interrupted the raids and burnings and massacres.

The spring of 1746 was worse even than the preceding year; for now the native Abnaki tribes were reinforced by the Micmacs of Nova Scotia, who were always hostile to the English, and by French Mohawks and even by savages from the far west. The French Indians were better armed and more fit for warring against the whites because of their introduction to the white man's Christianity. Their conversion brought close association with the Canadians and the acquisition of firearms. From the moment the settlers on the eastern and northern borders learned the French King had proclaimed war they knew the coming of the red horde was inevitable. Yet they clung to their rude cabins and stump-dotted clearings and persisted in attempting to harvest their thin crops and save their few horses and cattle; pitiable yet wonderful.

Philip Burnham, standing two inches over six feet, weathered of face and bony of features, came from the stockade and, with the easy, gliding step of one accustomed to forest running, joined Dresser. He abruptly announced—

"Guns are being fired in the east."

The old man lifted his head and listened. The sullen booming, muffled by the intervening forests, was audible to him now.

"It's off Merriconeag way. More misery for our poor people," he muttered.

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*Thomaston

"I heard one gun. Now they're firing several," commented Burnham.

Women appeared in cabin doorways and stared at the forest tops in the east, and went back to their work. A twelve-year-old boy settled himself on a stump and stared curiously at the two men for a moment but ignored the warning in the east. He was intent on lining a smooth, clean square of birch bark. His plummet of lead, cast in a wooden mold, was of the popular shape, that of a tomahawk. The gun-fire ceased for a few minutes, then was renewed, a dull thunder that meant death or worse. The lad on the stump with his tongue in his cheek was concerned only with his task. The ancient frowned as the youngster made a mistake and rebuked—

"You oughter take more heed what you're doing."

Burnham smiled in sympathy and remarked:

"He's doing good work, grandfather. He'll make a scholar. He'll be coming to our Harvard College."

"I can read," proudly spoke up the boy without looking from his work.

"Times ain't what they was in the old days," gloomily observed Dresser. "Younkers are gitting more uppity."

"That horse-path should be cleaned of timber," said Burnham. "As it is now an Injun can reach out from behind a tree and tomahawk a man as he rides by."

Without taking his gaze from the line slowly creeping across the bark the boy said:

"They caught Joseph Sweat close to Blanchard's just as he was entering that little holler. They killed him right there. I come over that piece of the path just ahead of him."

"Be seen if you must, but hold your tongue," rebuked Dresser. Then to Burnham, "Aye. It's a stubbon path. Injuns let the younker go by so's they could catch bigger game. If they hadn't known Sweat was coming they'd had his young pelt on the spot."

The narrowness of his escape did not seem to have any effect on the boy. In his simple philosophy, what was, was. The old man continued—

"I don't see what good 'twill do to make the path wider."

"It isn't a path," corrected Burnham. "Just a few tracks winding in and out through the growth."

"But what if it was all cleared for a width of twenty feet and all the stumps grubbed out?" countered the old man. "It would still be walled in by the woods." He abandoned the subject and threw up his head and turned his frosty blue eyes toward the east as the rumbling of gun fire sounded louder for a few moments.

"Wind's shifted. That was real plain," he commented. "It's the same scout of Injuns that did the mischief at Gorhamtown last April when they killed the poor Bryant family. They've been hanging 'round ever since. Now they're on our backs."

"They'll be here next," warned Burnham.

"Likely enough. But the dogs'll probably give us warning. No sense in stopping work to wait for 'em to show up. It ain't so bad for me as I'm old and ain't got no children nor nothing." Then with a reminiscent sparkle in his blue eyes, he boasted. "Why, I was here when they burned us out in 1698. Think of that! Them was the proper days. Men had more guts. Just as they had farther back when my father settled near Boston. Why, twenty years ago I killed bears within two miles of Boston. Yes, sir. Now to git one you have to go beyond Lynn. Times change for the worse. When I was your age I could prate* for pigeons any day and fetch 'em home by the cartload."

"There was lots of wolves, too," reminded the boy.

"Keep shet. Wolves? Well, I guess. My father helped build the fence across Nahant Neck to keep wolves from the cattle and swine pastured on the point. And he hunted moose forty miles from Boston and found 'em plenty. Why, he hunted whales in the bay, putting off from shore in open boats. Now they have to go to sea to git 'em. Times grow worser. What's England'n the French fighting about this time?"

"They're fighting to see whether a Spaniard or an Austrian shall rule the Kingdom of Naples. It'll be a stubborn fight before it's finished."

Dresser wrinkled his white brows and fumbled his beard and wondered:

"What business is it of England's or France's who rules in another country? And if it is any of their business, what in sin has that fuss to do with us up here in the woods? What do the Injuns, who we've known for years and lived in peace with, care what's going on across the sea."

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*Imitate.

"They're Christians and the priests tell them to fight."

"Then why don't we make 'em our Christians and set 'em on to the French?" demanded Dresser.

"'In Adam's fall we sinned all,'" proudly piped up the boy. "I read that out of a book."

"Hold your tongue!" sternly commanded Dresser.

Burnham said:

"The Iroquois, some of them, will be carrying our ax into Canada soon. When our expedition starts for Canada there'll be many of them with us. Then Canada will be given the same medicine we've been taking. I'm going along with William Johnson's Mohawks."

"Mohawks ain't Christians."

"They're wonderful fighters. If I had a dozen of them here today I'd soon stop that muttering in the east."

And he paused as more dull booming punctuated his speech.

"Widder Winter keeps a ax in reach all the time," broke in the boy.

"You keep shet!" angrily commanded the old man. Then to Burnham, "I ain't saying an ax isn't good. For it's mighty good if you have clearance to swing it in. But for close quarters give me a scythe. When they're crowding in and can't use their guns and arrers, there ain't nothing that'll beat a scythe. You don't have to swing it 'round your head. Just keep the point forward and hook it toward you and mow 'em down most mortally."

Then his thoughts took another channel and he was sighing:

"I keep thinking of that poor Bryant family at Gorhamtown. They wouldn't sleep in the fort nights. Along with the McLellan and Cloutman and Read families they would sleep out. Read come over to McLellans to borrer a chain and was carrying it home when the Injuns on their way to attack the McLellans caught him at the brook just above the house. Another band went to the Bryant cabin and killed and sculped four of the children and killed Bryant in the woods, but the boy got away. Cloutman was caught in the road and took to Canada along with Read. Mrs. McLellan's little girl went over to the Bryant cabin and heard the Injuns talking and run and told her mother. Mrs. McLellan called her husband and son from the field by blowing the horn. They fetched in water and got ready for an attack, but weren't bothered any."

"Remained in their cabin instead of going into the fort!" bitterly exclaimed Burnham.

"Well, it was their cabin," doggedly insisted the old man.

"And the Bryants owned their cabin. And they paid an awful price for it. There's the same trouble here. You folks won't fort yourselves. The Widow Winter slept outside last night. It's downright wrong."

"Something oughter be done to stop the whole bloody business," conceded Dresser.

"You'll never stop it until you chase the —— out of the woods and sleep inside the stockade. There are only thirty savages in the scout that got Sweat and are now pestering the Merriconeag people. You men here in North Yarmouth ought to send them flying up the Kennebec and the Penobscot. I came to Falmouth on Governor Shirley's business and wandered up here to see this settlement. I'm keen to be returning. But if you'll send out a scout I'll stay over and go along and help."

"The crops must be tended," said Dresser. "Leastwise, the women take on distressing like when we git out of meal."

"But four hundred pounds for every scalp will pay better than planting," argued Burnham.

"We can't eat money."

"Bread's good!" exclaimed the boy.

Before he could be reprimanded he put aside his bark and plummet and ran whooping toward a little girl. She entered into the play at once and pretended to be terrified as the boy went through the pantomime of scalping her. Her piercing shrieks caused a sudden eruption from two cabins. Her mother, a sallow, thin-faced woman, was swinging an ax over her head as her feet struck the ground. The widow Winter landed several feet from her door, her red hair flying and her strong arms holding an ax ready for a chopping blow.

Dresser chuckled and muttered—

"Oughter be well birched for fooling her."

Burnham stared admiringly at the two women and cried—

"Give me thirty such and I'll chase those thirty savages into —— and lock the doors."

"Law ag'in profane talk," reproved

Dresser. "You probably got into loose ways of speaking from running the woods so much."

"Just where do you want the savages chased to?" snapped Burnham.

"Well, thinking of poor Joe Sweat'n t'others, I guess —— good enough for 'em," slowly admitted Dresser.

THE women went back to their work. The children, sternly cautioned, resumed their play. The gun-fire continued at intervals in the east. The old man fell to dreaming and, with a recurrent flash of animation, eagerly asked:

"Is there lots of swans in the Merrimac now? And do the cranes eat up the cornfields as they uster? Ah, them was good days! Cranes fattened on stolen corn and dished up with turnips! And how the shoals of bass uster drive the mackrel into the Merrimac and up on the Lynn beach! We wheeled 'em home in barrows. Every shore was full of clams. Of course we have plenty of clams on this coast; but if you turn swine out to feed on 'em, as we did in Massachusetts in summer'n winter, you'd lose your pork. When you going back?"

"I'll start after dark. I plan to cross to Albany, stopping to see my sister at Fort Massachusetts on the Hoosac. I want her to stay in Boston or Albany until this trouble is over. Once in New York I'll hunt up William Johnson in the Mohawk country."

"You figger on seeing some fighting, I s'pose?"

"I know I shall have much fighting."

Dresser gazed approvingly at the bold, bony face and lean muscular figure.

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"I've a notion! I've been rooted down here long enough. And, by jolly! I was spry enough in William's war. And I left more'n one mark on the tribes in Anne's war."

"I'd suspect you must have been a mighty good fighting man in your day."

"Have been and in my day?" sharply retorted Dresser. I'm in my day now. I can l'arn you something about woods fighting. This war ain't being handled right. I'm going back to Massachusetts."

"Lor' knows things can be improved," sighed Burnham. "Governor Shirley is carrying the heavy end of the load. Wentworth of New Hampshire is helping as much as he can. Clinton is keen for New York to do her part, but a pig-headed assembly is blocking his path every day. If it wasn't for Johnson and his Mohawks, the French and their savages would have burned Albany before now."

"And mighty good riddance if they did!" passionately cried Dresser. "Do you know what we here in the east vowed after Anne's war was wound up? We vowed that if ever another war come the first thing we'd do would be to burn Albany and save the Injuns the trouble. Go through the traders' houses there and you'll find more'n one piece of silver that was taken from our eastern settlements. In Anne's war the Injuns outfitted at Albany for raiding us. And they took their stealings back to Albany to trade. You seem a proper man. Guess I'll travel along with you and take a whack at the Injuns."

"Glad of your company as far as New Hampshire. From there on I travel alone."

Dresser twisted his beard and grunted—

"Huh! Think I'm too old—that I'll be a nuisance."

"You'll be a good garrison fighter, but too old to follow me on a scout," was the frank reply.

Dresser was angry, and rapidly combed his fingers through the white beard. He grumbled—

"There's them who'll be glad of my company and help."

He refused to converse further and turned to face the east where the dull voices of the guns testified to a stubborn fight. Dresser gave his attention to the children's play.

The boy of the plummet was now artfully stalking a younger lad. The little girl who had frightened the women with her screams was watching them round-eyed and anxious to dramatize herself into a leading rôle. As the stealthy advance approached the climax of an open attack the girl stole into the cabin and brought out a long tin horn and carried it to the younger boy. Before Dresser could interfere the youngster seized the horn and blew a long blast.

Almost instantly the women came out again, shrilly calling their children to shelter. A dog came bounding up but quickly sensed it was a false alarm. By the time Dresser had explained the situation to the women some of the men came running from the woods. A second explanation followed and the men decided not to return to their isolated corn patches until after the midday meal.

They gathered in a group and talked about the crops, about the shortage of meal and the forwardness of the season. They questioned Burnham about the great expedition against Canada. They praised Massachusetts for energetically taking the lead in this campaign. They were highly pleased to believe Canada was wild with alarm. The invasion would end successfully before the leaves began to color and the Indians would cease their raids. They became apprehensive when Burnham explained:

"Until Montreal and Quebec are taken you'll have it harder than ever. They'll try to make it so hot for our borders that the men will stay at home to save the settlements."

"Guess the Southern colonies will have to send the men," spoke up Greeley. "Way things are happening, I guess we'll be kept mighty busy right here at home."

"If you'd abandon this place and all the settlements east of Falmouth or Scarborough, you'd have men enough to stand off any raid and some men to spare to capture Canada," insisted Burnham. "There's the place to stop the fighting on this side the ocean. Strike at the heart of Canada. The Indians will quit when they see Canada is being whipped. There ain't more'n six hundred houses in Quebec. It'll be easier to take than Louisburg. Then Montreal and Three Rivers will surrender without much fighting. Then we'll have Canada. The French will be on their knees and their Indians will run away and send back belts, begging for peace."

The father of the little girl who had caused two alarms savagely declared:

"My family needs meal. I'll harvest corn if all the —— from —— try to stop me."

"Softly, brother," admonished Dresser. "Don't brag to the Almighty what you'll do against evil spirits. Pray for help and do your best."

Before the settler could make reply his wife called from the cabin:

"Don't stand there doing nothing. Git up some candle-wood. I've even got to borrer fire from Widder Winter. Ours is plumb out."

Others decided they were wasting time and they scattered to collect fat pine knots for candle-wood and work up fire-wood. Only Greeley and another man remained. Burnham urged that they plant potatoes for staple crop, and his suggestion was roundly denounced. Even the Canadians would not eat potatoes. It was a well-known fact that a steady diet of potatoes would kill any man inside of seven years.

Wearying of the useless discussion Burnham picked up his Queen Anne musket, and offered—

"If I can borrow a dog, I'll scout a bit."

The little group tilted their heads to listen to the occasional gun-fire, and Greeley said:

"Dogs a-plenty. All knowing critters. You're welcome to one."

He whistled a peculiar note, and a large black, shaggy animal came running from the Winter cabin.

"This one is the pick of the lot," assured Greeley. "If he could talk he could tell us what happened to his master, either dead or a prisoner in Canada. He dragged himself home to the little boy, a long arrer sticking in his side. As he couldn't lead us to a dead body we think our neighbor was carried off alive. He's a mighty likely dog. His name is General. He won't bark or act foolish in any way. He's a reg'lar scout, and he hates Injuns much as we do."

Then he turned to the dog and whispered—

"Injuns! General."

The dog's lips curled back but he made no sound.

Burnham talked to the dog and patted his big head and in a few moments had reached an understanding with him. The dog walked by his side till they neared the woods, when he ran ahead.

"Wait a minute!" called out Dresser.

Burnham glanced back and beheld the old man trotting after him. He was armed only with a scythe.

Burnham frowned and advised:

"If you're going into the woods you'd better drop that and get a gun. Or pick up a club."

"Woods is free," snapped the old man. "Room for both of us. If you have to fire your gun and are lucky enough to git a chance, you'll then have to depend on your tomahawk. Give me clearance and this weapon never misses fire and is always loaded. At close quarters it'll slice the fighting spirit out of an Injun before you can git ready to use your tomahawk."

"You'll be tumbling down and cutting your throat. I'm scouting only a short distance. Take the dog and I'll go by myself."

"The dog has his own notions about scouting. And I never hamper folks with my company," retorted Dresser.

And he changed his course and struck into the growth some distance from Burnham.

The dog would not attach himself closely to either man. He was used to working alone. Dresser and Burnham were several rods apart, and the latter, originally intending to strike due east, found himself following General in a southerly direction. Although used to observing dogs trained in woodcraft, Burnham was surprized and delighted by the intelligence displayed by General. He moved like a black shadow.

IT WAS twilight under the new thick foliage. Burnham searched the forest floor for signs of the enemy and depended on the dog to warn him of any ambush. He found nothing to indicate danger, and as General reported no discoveries he was convinced there were no enemy near the settlement. The band that killed Joseph Sweat must have been passed on to Merriconeag.

An hour passed, the dog shifting his direction to the east and back again, and then working due south. Burnham suddenly realized it was some time since he had heard or seen Dresser. He halted and anxiously peered about through the timber. He soon glimpsed the white beard some distance on his right, and he smiled approvingly at the workmanlike way in which the ancient was covering the littered forest floor.

"Soft-footed as a Mohawk," he told himself. "Must have been mighty cunning in the old wars."

The dog was now slowly advancing in a straight line, his head low and thrust well forward. He moved forward as if having a definite purpose, and might have been a specter for all the noise he made. Burnham's interest quickened as he realized General's demeanor had changed. The black head was turned as if to ascertain if the woodsman was attending to business. Burnham's pulse jumped as he drew near enough to observe the erect ruff of hair. He had been so thoroughly convinced that no savages were in the neighborhood that he could scarcely believe the contrary now. Yet General was very purposeful in his maneuvering, and Greeley had vouched for his forest wisdom.

The dog lead him to game-trail and crossed it and then came to a halt on the edge of growth of saplings and bushes that was filling in a small opening where fire had destroyed the ancient timber. This "burn" consisted of not more than two acres and was thick with gray birch and alders and berry bushes.

The dog remained motionless, staring into the tangle. The ruff remained fully erect. Burnham treed himself and endeavored to locate the focal point of the animal's burning gaze. Where the vision could penetrate the birches and alders it was halted by masses of charred logs partly covered by raspberry bushes.

Burnham spared a quick glance to locate Dresser. The old man was not in sight. The tense tableau was dissipated as, with a snarling growl of inexorable hatred, the dog plunged into the cover.

"——!" screeched Dresser somewhere on Burnham's right.

There was much crashing about in the bushes and the dog was making a savage worrying sound. Burnham quit his tree and darted forward. He barely had time to swing up the barrel of his gun as a brawny copper-colored arm rose above a bush, the hand gripping a French ax.

The barrel struck the arm just as the ax was being released. The gun exploded and the handle of the ax clipped Burnham on the side of the head and knocked him to his knees. He came to his feet, his tomahawk drawn. A terrific yell told him that Dresser still lived. He plunged into the growth to have it out with his assailant. There was blood on the leaves, but no Indian. He heard the crashing of careless steps deep in the growth but no sound from the dog. Fearing for Dresser's safety he ran to where the old man should be. He was in time to witness a terrible finale.

At the first glimpse he saw nothing except a lively agitation among some berry bushes. Then, like two Jacks-in-a-box, Dresser and a naked Indian popped up on opposite sides of a raspberry bush. The savage howled triumphantly and brought back his arm.

For half a second the long blade of the French ax was obstructed by a barbed branch, and in that insignificant bit of time the trend of the tragic climax was reversed. For the blade of the scythe finished darting forward and hooked around the Indian's neck. Burnham cried out in amazement as he beheld the painted head hopping from the brawny shoulders and the deluge of blood covering the bushes.

"Good ——! Never saw the like before!" weakly exclaimed Burnham.

"A good fighting man in my day, mebbe?" panted Dresser. "Only good for a fort-soldier, huh? Wish I'd hooked him 'round the middle! Then I'd shown you slicing that is slicing."

"Never would I have believed it could be done!"

"It ain't exactly new," Dresser confessed. "Dick Hunniwell, the Injun-fighter, done the same trick on the Scarborough marsh in Anne's war."

"Get the scalp. Worth four hundred pounds. My reward is a big lump on my head," said Burnham.

He whistled for the dog and waited anxiously for the animal to put in an appearance. Dresser neatly removed the savage's scalp-lock and tied it to the handle of his scythe. He was impatient to return to the settlement and display his trophy.

"Couldn't been more'n three of 'em. One tackled you. The dog was fast to another and this critter thought he'd have some fun killing an old man. Faugh!" And he kicked the naked trunk. "Ain't got the decency to cover his nakedness."

Burnham would not proceed until he had finished reloading his musket. As he finished there was a movement in the scrub growth, and both men glided to cover. As the noise grew louder the two relaxed their caution and, grinning broadly, Burnham laconically remarked—

"The General!"

The dog bounded into sight, wagging his tail. Then his eyes blazed and he showed his teeth in a silent snarl as he came upon the dead Micmac.

Burnham dropped on his knees, alarmed by the blood on the shaggy coat and around the muzzle and throat. But except for a shallow cut on one side General was uninjured.

"If he ain't made a kill he come mighty near to it!" rejoiced Dresser.

Burnham fondled the big head and murmured:

"Pup, you're my dog if they can spare you. You're like that Hunniwell man, a regular Injun-hater."

"Well, it's gitting dark in here. No more Injuns in this neighborhood or we'd had 'em on our backs," reminded Dresser.

But Burnham would not return to the settlement until he had examined more closely the scene of the dog's encounter. There was a trail of blood leading from the thicket which he followed for quarter of a mile, when it abruptly ceased. Convinced the two Indians had bandaged their wounds and were able to travel rapidly Burnham consented to turn back.

On entering the clearing they found the cabins deserted and the settlers forted. The place was so silent one might have believed it was empty of all life.

"Here we are!" yelled Burnham from the edge of the open ground.

"I killed a bloody Micmac! He's bloodier now than afore he was killed!" bellowed Dresser, and he held up the scythe with its grim pendant.

The dog bounded for the Winter cabin and, failing to find the little boy, made for the stockade. Then the gate was thrown open and the settlers rushed out, loudly rejoicing over the death of an enemy.

Greeley shouted:

"That helps square off poor Sweat's murder! I hope to live till I pay them back tenfold."*

"All the dead Injuns that ever was couldn't square off Joe Sweat's death," grimly spoke up the Widow Winter as she stared exultantly at the scalp-lock. "But it was mortally well done."

Burnham, chagrined that he should be outdone by a dog and an old man, glanced at the western sun, now teetering on the forest crown, and announced:

"I'm starting back. If you're going with me, old grampa, get a knife and ax and a blanket and a chunk of corn-bread."

"Bad enough to be called 'grampa' without hitching 'old' to it," grumbled Dresser. With a dry chuckle he added, "You kindly allow I'm still fit for woods running?"

"You're a rare old ——!" enthusiastically declared Burnham. "I'll never forget how that Micmac's head leaped into the air. You men now see how easy it is to make four hundred pounds. All you have to do is to get out and hunt them. Keep after them! They won't bother a place where they can't have it all their own way. You folks have quite a few dogs. If no one objects, I'd like to take General with me."

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*He was killed from ambush August 9th of this year. His death warned the garrison and saved it from a surprize attack.

"Take him, mister. You've earned him," said Greeley. "We'll have enough left. This is a rare day for North Yarmouth. And if Uncle Dresser don't mind we'll find that Micmac's head and plant it on top of a pole in the Brunswick path."

This plan for advertising the settlement's prowess was warmly endorsed. While Dresser went for belt weapons, a blanket and a covering for his bald head, Burnham gave directions for finding the scene of the fight. And he petted the dog and asked for bear grease to apply to the knife wound. The long, matted hair had prevented a mortal thrust. The dog appreciated the attention and licked the borderer's hands, but when it came to exchanging masters he wagged his tail, then dropped his head and went and stood by the little boy whose father was either dead or a prisoner among the French.

The Winter woman whispered:

"I'm glad. He won't leave the child. He was with the father when the Injuns got him. The boy needs him more'n you do."

CHAPTER II

MRS. STRONG GOES FOR MEAL

WHEN King George's war began there were more Sokoki Indians at and around Gorhamtown than there were whites. For years the two races had lived in amity. White boys played with Indian boys and were to fight each other to the death when the two crowns disagreed. Red hunters came and went and slept in the settlers' cabins. An Indian never learned the etiquette of rapping on a door, and at any hour a squaw might shuffle in and squat before the blazing logs and stolidly wait to be fed.

Not only did the Sokoki trap and hunt in the surrounding forests, but they maintained one of their ancient settlements not far from the ten white cabins. Overlooking the cabins was Phinney's garrison on Fort Hill. The old planting grounds of the Sokoki were scattered from their village through the wilderness and up the Presumpscot to the Great Lake of the Sokoki and farther west to the rich meadows of the Pequawkets in the shadows of the White Mountains. The woods and intervales along the Saco also were in the domain of this Abnaki tribe.

The nearest other settlement was Falmouth, sixteen miles distant and on the seashore. With the exception of the latter, Gorhamtown with its sixty souls was the most important settlement in the district of Maine east of Scarborough. Ever since the first cabin was built in 1639 this border community had stubbornly held its place although directly in the path of Indians traveling from the east to attack the settlements in New Hampshire and Massachusetts.

It was close to sunrise when Burnham and Dresser halted inside the woods at the edge of the clearing. There was the silence of the dead over the opening. The two travelers had discovered no signs of the enemy during their all-night journey, although at one time Dresser had insisted he smelled smoke. Both were too well versed in red cunning to take anything for granted, and they remained concealed until convinced none of the mauraders was hiding along the edge of the woods and waiting for some unfortunate to come within gun or arrow shot.

A thin fog had been drifting in from the south, leaving the morning misty and blurring the vision. Yet they could make out the squat structure of the fort on the slight elevation commanding the town. This defense was oblong in shape, and the side facing their position extended for fifty feet. The garrison house, besides being surrounded by a stockade of twelve-foot timbers, had two watch-towers on opposite corners.

For half an hour the white men remained hidden, waiting for the garrison to show signs of life. At last the blood-red edge of the sun showed through the mist. Somewhere a puppy was yapping his impatience to be released. A breeze from the north discovered the fog and began rolling the intruder back to the Atlantic. The motionless figure of a sentinel, standing beside a six-pound swivel gun in a watch-tower, became plainly visible.

Wisps of blue smoke began climbing lazily from three cabin chimneys. Dresser in a whisper complained:

"Out of ten families seven had brains enough to sleep inside the stockade. Only last April it was the signal-guns that saved the settlement by calling help from Falmouth. At that time four families were sleeping outside although they knew the Injuns was close. It's always the old story over again."

"We can go ahead now," murmured Burnham.

"And mebbe be shot before we can reach the stockade gate. Wait till they let the dogs out."

"There are no savages near here," replied Burnham. "Anyway, here come the dogs."

Simultaneously dogs now emerged from the garrison and the cabins and silently set about their business of scouting the edge of the forest. The watchfulness of these four-footed guardians was of inestimable value although their loyalty is commemorated largely by tradition. As they slowly made for the timber there was only the yapping of the puppy to break the silence; but from cabins and garrison sharp eyes were watching.

It was pleasing to observe how thoroughly the dogs responded to their environment and how suspiciously they approached each log and stump in the clearing and refused to take anything for granted. Satisfied no Indian was concealed in the clearing they cautiously reconnoitered the hem of the timber. A short-haired animal of the mastiff breed quickly scented the white men. He halted a dozen feet from their hiding place and wrinkled his muzzle but did not growl or bark.

Burnham called to him softly and then stood up. Now the dog growled a bit. The stranger was a white, but he had been in hiding. But when Dresser stood up and spoke to him he hung his head and wagged his tail as if ashamed that he had for a moment questioned their honesty.

Once the newcomers were on their feet they were instantly discovered; and from the cabins three women, two herding children before them, frantically made for the garrison. The swivel-gun in the watchtower was brought to bear on the suspects. Through his hands Dresser loudly shouted his name. Then he snatched off his muskrat hat, and his bald head thoroughly identified him.

Men came from the stockade as the two advanced up the slope with the dog at their heels. Other dogs ran up and sniffed their legs. The mother of the puppy decided it was safe for her offspring to venture outside the stockade. The first man to greet the visitors was William McLellan who, with his father, so narrowly escaped death two months before when the Bryant family was massacred.

"SAW you was white, but had a notion you might be Frenchmen come along to lead the Injuns. What's the news? Whose this new man?"

Dresser made Burnham known to the settlers and added:

"Gun-firing off Merriconeag way yesterday. We buried Joseph Sweat, killed two days ago on the Falmouth path. Took a notion late yesterday to go scouting and found this." And he proudly held up the scythe so all might see the dangling Micmac scalp.

Captain John Phinney, commander of the garrison and descendant of the first settler, came from the stockade, crying—

"What you got, Joshua Dresser?"

"Good land! It's a hank of Injun hair, Cap'n!" cried young MeLellan. "Every one turn out and see what old man Dresser's got!"

"Softly, softly," growled Dresser. "Not so awful old when I can go out and scythe 'em down."

"But how did it happen?" asked Phinney.

"Never happened," shortly corrected Dresser. "It was well planned. My young friend here went out with me. Let him tell it."

Burnham promptly gave a dramatic recital of the adventure, bestowing all the credit on Dresser and the dog.

"Heart's love!" shrilly exclaimed a small woman whose staring black eyes and thin, prematurely aged face testified eloquently to endless hardships and a continuing fear. She was leading a flaxen-haired little girl who held to her breast a doll made of a corncob and a scrap of red gimp. "Why can't more of them be killed in the woods?"

"They can, ma'am, if the men will hunt them in the woods as they would any other wild animal," promptly assured Burnham. "They'll keep away from this place if they know white men are waiting in the woods to meet them at their own game."

"If you want Injuns," added Dresser, "you must go where they be. Don't wait for 'em to come to you. For they'll come when you're not looking for 'em."

Another woman, broad of hips and with the arms of a strong man, laughed loudly and in a deep voice cried:

"Scythed his head off! I'd liked fearful well to a seen that goodly sight! John, next time you go to Falmouth you fetch me home a scythe."

The man addressed, undersized and wavering of gaze, ducked his head and promised:

"I'll do it, Molly. I dunno how, but I'll do it if I have to steal it."

"It's the best bit of mowing ever done in Maine," insisted Burnham, and his rough humor was greeted with shouts of triumph. He was quick to continue, "That one sweep of Dresser's scythe not only removed a wicked enemy but earned for Dresser four hundred pounds. Think of it! If you men will go into the woods you'll make a fat faring."

His audience became grave. The husband of the amazon was the first to take exceptions, saying:

"I dunno about that, mister. Cap'n Lovewell went scalp hunting and got killed with lots of his men. We've stuck it out so far by sleeping at the fort and keeping snug. We've managed to plant some corn in the old Sokoki fields. That's about as much risk as we dare take so long as we have women and children with us. The young 'uns are starving for meal as it is. Even now we're waiting for Mary Strong to come back from Falmouth. She oughter come in this morning. We've been so hard put that we've had to use some of planting-seed for the young 'uns."

"The woman went to Falmouth in the night?" queried Burnham.

"In the night. Of course. Only way to git through. Took a hoss and started after dark. Several of our women-folks have made the trip this season."

"I've been twice and I'd like to see a dirty Injun stop me," hoarsely declared the amazon.

Captain Phinney quietly explained:

"Every one's come back so far. They reach Falmouth early in the morning. And, traveling by night, they come back here the following morning."

"Mary Strong's the first one not to make the round trip," nervously added the amazon's husband.

"She's been held back by some reason. She ain't fool enough to try and come in the day time," wearily spoke up the black-eyed woman. "It's my turn next. This is Mary's little girl, mister."

And she frowned at her neighbors to refrain from depressing prophecies.

"Good land! Every one knows Mary Strong's all right," exclaimed the amazon with a boisterous confidence which was not shared by her scowling eyes.

The little girl hugged her doll tighter and her small form quivered, but she made no outcry. Burnham smoothed her light hair and announced:

"Dresser and I will go and meet her. She may need a lift with that bag of meal. We didn't plan to go to Falmouth, but after we've had a little sleep and a bite to eat we'll swing down that way."

Every family clamored for the privilege of acting the host, but Burnham refused, and explained:

"We've brought our own rations with us. Haven't you any outscouts in the woods?"

"Humphrey's out. Guess he's all right. We ain't heard any guns," said Phinney. "He's one of our best men. And you came through without any trouble."

"Didn't see a thing. Couldn't—along of the darkness. Didn't hear anything either. But I vum I smelled smoke. Just like a fire banked for the night."

"I believe the woods were clear when we came through," insisted Burnham. "That doesn't mean they're clear now. The scout down Merriconeag way may return in this direction."

"Well, if they come back we can't help it," decided Phinney. "We're losing time. The cornfields must be tended. No knowing how soon we may be cooped up. I was hoping the Injuns would be kept in Canada now we're going to send an army up there."

"Don't think that," earnestly advised Burnham. "They'll send every savage they can, thinking to keep the army at home to protect the borders."

"Mebbe, mebbe. Come into the fort and rest, and then see if you learn anything about Mrs. Strong. There may not be any corn in Falmouth and she may have to wait. Or the mill at Capisic may be busted down and she's waiting till it's fixed. The miller's a fair man. He won't make her wait her turn behind Falmouth people. And he don't take any toll for our grinding."

"If he did we women wouldn't fetch back any," grumbled the amazon. "Last time I made the trip I had just enough to buy half a bushel."

Phinney conducted Burnham and Dresser inside the stockade. Five men started for their patches of corn in the old Sokoki field, and five went with them as guards. Two dogs also went along with this party.

Those who slept in the fort had returned to their cabins, and the children were given their meager breakfast and were turned out to play. From the watch-tower overlooking the settlement and the ancient fields of the Sokoki Burnham watched the men straggling to their work and then shifted his gaze to the children playing "Injun." They contrived cunning ambushes, but never ventured far from the cabins. They engaged in mock battles, but seldom lifted their voices. The little Strong girl didn't join in the play. Hugging the doll she stood watching the mouth of the Falmouth horse-path; and Burnham knew that at that moment a little boy in North Yarmouth was holding a dish of weeds on his bare knees and staring into the north.

"God!" he groaned. "How hard on the children!"

Two women with a horse and long chain began dragging logs up to the cabins. This work was not to accumulate firewood but to remove cover for any Indians attempting to enter the clearing. Later, the stumps would be grubbed up.

DRESSER was asleep. Burnham turned to leave the tower, but halted for a moment as a man ran from the woods on the north side. He would have discharged the swivel and recalled the men from the cornfields had not the man slowed to a walk once he entered the clearing.

Burnham descended and hastened down the slope to where Phinney and the amazon's husband were greeting the newcomer. The man proved to be an express from New Marblehead.* This settlement on the northern boundary of Gorhamtown was safe, he said; but almost out of gunpowder.

"There's scurce two shoots to a man left," he explained. "If you can't lend us some, I must keep on to Falmouth."

"We will let you have a milkpan full," promptly decided Phinney. "We can't spare it, but you can have it. Some of you women get a stout bag. See any signs on the way down?"

"Found ashes of a fire. Several days old. Picked up eighteen spits they'd used for broiling beef. Knew it was beef as there was the skin and bones of a cow. That was half way between here and home."

"That means eighteen savages squatted 'round that fire," mused Phinney. "Probably part of the scout that killed Sweat over Gorhamtown way two days ago. This man is Phil Burnham. He says they was at Merriconeag yesterday. Old man Dresser, now asleep in the fort, cut a Micmac's head off with a scythe."

"Glory to God for that!" fervently exclaimed the express. "That news will be almost as welcome as the powder. Just as soon as I can have the powder I'll be starting. I'd like to wait till night, but they're waiting for it."

The black-eyed woman, for the moment unaccompanied by the child, shivered and clicked her teeth and moaned:

"Mary Strong must 'a' been killed or caught! I feel it in my bones. I'd almost rather die than see her little girl when she l'arns her mother ain't ever coming home again."

"You mustn't think that, nor talk it," sharply rebuked Burnham. "I'll get my few winks of sleep now, and go and look for her."

And forthwith he directed he be aroused at midday, and returned to the fort and stretched out on the floor. He knew no more until some one shook him by the shoulder.

"Time to be stirring. Sun's overhead. I've eaten. Finish the cornbread while we travel."

Only the amazon's husband and the women were in the clearing as the two crossed it to enter the Falmouth path. They passed close to the little girl sitting in a cabin doorway. She had the doll pressed tightly to her small bosom. She had understood all she had heard that morning. Burnham had promised to find her mother. He was a giant in her eyes. She called out shrilly—the first time he had heard her speak—and reminded—

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*Windham.

"Find my mother."

"Sure's a fiddle, little lady," boisterously replied Burnham, and he caught her up and set her on his shoulder for a moment. "Don't you fret any."

"Find her," she repeated, her voice trembling.

Burnham hurried on ahead of Dresser so the old man might not witness his weakness, and furtively wiped his eyes.

"Curse the —— savages and the —— French who set 'em on our backs!" groaned the old man.

"Amen to all that!" hoarsely replied Burnham. "And we'll soon be setting savages on French backs now that William Johnson has his Mohawks keen to carry the ax into Canada." After a moment he qualified this by lugubriously adding, "That is, if the Albany assembly will pay the Injuns their scalp money. They expect it on the spot when they fetch in any hair; and they want it in hard money and not in promises."

The forest they were now penetrating by an almost invisible path was primeval in its wildness. Practically all of the district of Maine, with the exception of stretches of seacoast and river intervale, was covered by ancient timber. From river to river, from the meadows along the White Mountains to beyond the Penobscot, stretched the towering roof with the forest floor littered with fallen and decaying tree trunks. These woods were always wet. Pools of stagnant water, hidden from the sun, persisted throughout the summer. The matted roots held the moisture even on the sides of steep slopes. Swamps and morasses were mapped by settlers, whose descendants were to marvel at what appeared to be errors as they found dry and often arid land where their forefathers had found only bogs. Snow remained late in these gloomy growths. The rains were retained long in the soil. Small streams flowed under a roof of interlacing branches, and inside the old timber it was twilight even at midday.

Between and around the countless obstacles formed by pools and fallen timber ran the trace to Falmouth. No birds sang in the damp shadows, and only the hum and buzz of insects or the crashing to the ground of some weakly rooted tree disturbed the quiet of the roofed-in solitudes. Where wind or fire had created a small opening and revealed the earth to the sun's rays for the first time in centuries, saplings and bushes at once came up to win the opening back to the wilderness. To clear this cumbered land and to transform it into fields seemed almost impossible even had there never been the red plague.

In all this thickly forested territory there were but four or five public garrisons and not more than twenty-five blockhouses. These stockade places often were garrisoned by very few men, yet had to suffice as a protection for a score of settlements, widely scattered and found as far east as the German cabins at Waldoborough near Penobscot bay. That a general massacre did not exterminate every white person in the district at the outset of the Indian raids was due entirely for the savages' dislike for attacks in force. Had the Maine and Canadian tribes struck decisively, they could have blotted out the Maine frontier during the first summer's fighting. Owing to the desultory although bloody mode of warfare the settlers managed to survive. They clung to their log cabins and stump patches with a stubbornness not to be understood by those who are familiar only with round, well-grassed hills and fair meadows, with well-tilled fields and pleasing upland pastures.

Burnham took the lead, his eyes and ears keenly on the alert. He was pleased with his companion's stealthy woods ways. Dresser had boasted none in claiming to know forest craft. But ever in Burnham's mind were two pictures—a little boy with his dish of Massachusetts weeds and a tiny girl mothering a corn-cob doll. A mile from town, skirting a dark pool, Burnham pointed out the tracks of a horse in the sodden leaves. The tracks led toward Falmouth.

"Please God we meet her safe and sound or find her waiting in Falmouth," muttered Dresser.

"Of course we'll find her. You talk like you thought she were dead," growled Burnham.

"There's so many who just walk into the woods and never come back," mumbled Dresser. "Mebbe fifty or a hundred years from now bones may be found."

"Enough of croaking," harshly interrupted Burnham. "The woman stayed over a day in Falmouth. She had to wait to buy corn. Or the mill at Capisic was out of order."

They pressed on, assailed by mosquitoes and small flies that were as voracious as Micmacs. At the end of four miles they halted long enough to rub more grease on their faces and hands as a protection against the mosquitoes. They barely had resumed their journey when they were startled by the ominous boom of a gun ahead and to the right of the path. The reverberation scarcely had ceased when the thunder of several guns fired together smote their ears.

"By ——! Some unfortinit is in trouble with a parcel of savages!" exclaimed Dresser.

"We must even up the odds!" said Burnham as he advanced at a forest lope.

Although encumbered by the scythe, most awkward to carry along the twisting, narrow path, Dresser kept close to his companion. After a few minutes of rapid traveling guns were heard again. Burnham left the path and struck off at an acute angle to the southwest. The two were soon halted by Abnaki war-whoops, sounding close ahead. Dresser stood at his companion's shoulder, his snags of teeth showing between the tightly drawn, snarling lips.

"It's all over!" he hissed.

Almost immediately a stentorian voice somewhere ahead shouted—

"Go to ——!"

"A man of wrathful speech," huskily mumbled Dresser. "But lord, how sweet!"

Burnham, weak from reaction for a moment, recovered his poise and darted in the direction of the voice, winding his way around insurmountable obstacles and leaping moss-covered trunks. The savage chorus was being renewed, and as yet the scalp-cry had not sounded. But the white man was not to be intimidated by noise, and he repeated his decisive defiance.

But now a terribly tragic note was added—the voice of a woman screaming—

"One on this side!"

WITH a final burst of speed Burnham came up on the scene and treed himself while he got his bearings. Dark waters filled a circular hollow nearly a hundred feet in diameter. In the middle of this and rising but a few feet above the water was a small knoll. A few stumps and a pallid bush-growth surmounted this small eminence. The savages were silent, and it required a moment for Burnham to discover them so close were they treed on his side of the pool. Then he saw them, five of them.

Dresser touched his arm and motioned for him to shift his gaze toward the knoll and whispered:

"In the water! See it?"

The borderer saw, and his eyes opened widely. The naked figure of a Micmac was floating face down like a monster frog close to the knoll. From a horrible wound in the back of his head threads of blood were tinting the water. There was nothing to be seen of the white man and woman.

"They're cooped on the knoll," softly whispered Dresser. "Injuns ain't got 'em yet."

But now the Indians commenced howling, infuriated by the sight of their dead companion. They were promptly answered by a white voice, profane yet explicit. The woman shrieked:

"They're coming all together, Nahum! Don't let 'em take me alive!"

She correctly anticipated the Indians next move for, with a final discharge of their guns, they pulled tomahawks and knives and plunged into the dark water.

Burnham heard the staccato snap of the hammer as the white man's gun missed fire. The savages, now waist deep, howled exultingly and hastened their advance on the knoll. Burnham stepped from his tree and threw up a gun and shot a savage, now beyond his depth and swimming nearest the knoll. The heavy ball hit him between the shoulders and those behind him saw the fearful wound. Paralyzed for a moment they halted their advance.

"Close in! Close in! We've got them!" Burnham loudly commanded as he darted forward to the edge of the pool.

The four savages were now alive to the situation and were frantically striving to regain the bank and recover their French muskets. Dresser whooped like a madman and joined his friend. Burnham stood over the discarded muskets and began reloading, yelling to Dresser to turn the savages back.

But as the Indians failed to discover more than two white men they came on determinedly. Dresser danced along the edge of the pool. An ax whirled from the water and stuck in a tree behind him. A Sokoki man endeavored to scramble from the water and come to grips, but Dresser hungrily hooked the scythe forward and ripped a red seam from the buttocks to the neck. With a loud howl this man threw himself backward and made for another exit from the pool. A Micmac half emerged from the water opposite Burnham's position, and the latter came from behind his tree and clubbed his musket. With his arm broken close to the shoulder, the Micmac retreated. This ended the fight as the four savages now had but one thought—to gain the farther bank of the pool and escape.

"Are you all right over there?" anxiously called out Dresser, leaning on his scythe.

"Fit as sunshine, neighbor," boisterously shouted the man.

And he stood up among the dead branches and litter of bark and helped a woman to rise to her feet.

"Come ashore! Get that hair on the way. Worth four hundred pounds each," directed Burnham as he finished reloading his gun. Then he pointed to the French muskets and powder horns and Dresser dropped his scythe to charge these.

"Take the sculps. I'll make it alone," said the woman, shaking off the man's hand and sliding into the water. She floundered ashore while her companion gathered his gruesome harvest.

"Much obliged, Nahum," said Burnham as the man joined him and handed over the scalp of the man killed by the musket ball.

"How'd you know my name? I don't know you," asked the man.

"The woman called you Nahum."

"I'm Nahum Jessraday. Glad you happened along. The Injuns were about to finish us when you pitched in. That is, they'd kill one of us. It ain't written yet that I'm to die. But I'd 'bout as well be as to be carried off to Canada. They paid a fancy price just in trying to git us. Two's dead. You'n your friend hurt two of them. And we've got their hair and guns and powder. What I call a rare day's work."

"But this woman?" cried Burnham, staring hopefully at the dirt-grimed face as the woman wrung the water from her skirt.

"She's Mary Strong of Gorhamtown. I was seeing she got home all right when those pesky —— jumped us. We was driven from the Falmouth path, and lucky so. This dead water and the hummock in the middle was what give us a breathing spell."

"The good Lord be praised!" rejoiced Burnham. "Your little girl is waiting for you, ma'am. We came to find you. My friend is Joshua Dresser, of North Yarmouth."

The woman whimpered for a few moments at the mention of her child, but quickly conquered the weakness, and explained:

"Something was busted at the Capisic mill. Had to wait. They tried to keep me till night, but I knew the young 'un would be staring her eyes out. So I risked it, and Nahum was neighborly enough to come along. I oughter have a hoss and a bag of Injun meal nigh here somewheres."

With three of the guns loaded the men scattered through the timber and soon discovered the horse tied to a tree with the precious bag of meal on his back.

"We'll see you and Nahum nearly to the settlement, ma'am," said Burnham.

"Good land! Don't you men put yourselves out any more. Just give me one of those guns and a shoot of powder. I'll be all right."

"I'll take one gun and horn for my friend. You may carry all the rest and the powder home," replied Burnham.

THEY gathered up the French muskets and powder-horns and strung out behind the woman, who rode the horse. When they reached the path Jessraday removed the scalp from his belt and tucked it under the strap holding the meal in place, and remarked:

"Worth four hundred pounds. It belongs to you. You fetch him the crack that ended his business."

"She killed the Injun?" exclaimed Dresser. "I'd allowed you clubbed him with your musket."

"She fetched him the crack," proudly assured Jessraday. "Happened to bring with her a long piece of chain the miller gave her. She knew some of the men at the settlement would have use for it. Had it linked around her wrist when she quit the hoss and we ran for it. When the Injun sneaked up her side of the hummock she swung it around her head and fetched him an awful crack."

"Only thing left for a body to do," explained Mrs. Strong over her shoulder. "I was thinking about my little girl and just felt ugly all through."

"You're a brave woman, ma'am," said Burnham.

"Don't take much spunk to do the only thing left for a body to do," she diffidently replied.

"And when we heard you shouting, Jessraday, we knew the Indians had a brave man cornered," added Burnham.

"I ain't brave," modestly disclaimed Jessraday. "My dream was all right, or I'd been scared blue." Observing the two men were puzzled he hastened to explain. "I have that dream about so often, and it's mortal distressing. But it's ended right so far. So I knew the worst that could happen to me was to be taken to Canada."

"You dreamed something that made you think you were safe?" asked Burnham.

"Dreamed something that made me know I was safe," mildly corrected Jessraday. "That is, safe till I dream it different. I have the same dream once or twice a year. That shows me that sometime it'll have a different ending. Then I'll know my days are numbered."

"Nonsense," bruskly said Burnham. "A dream can't protect a man."

"And every man's days are numbered, dream or no dream," added Dresser.

" A dream can warn a man," gravely insisted Jessraday. "So long as he don't see me I know I'm all right. The dead man, you know."

"The dead man? What dead man?" spluttered Dresser. "Dead men can't see nothing and can't help nobody."

"The dead man in my dream will catch sight of me sometime. Then Nahum Jessraday will stop working and fighting. Yes, sir! No doubt about that," was the grim reply. "It's like this—first I always hear the pounding of hoofs, faint at first and far off. Lord! but what a skeery sound. I'll never be as afraid of death as I be of that first *thumpity-thump, thumpity-thump* of galloping hoofs. When it hits my ear I can't tell the direction. Don't know where to hide. It grows louder'n louder. Then I know which way its coming from. I dig for cover and hide and wait. It's awful. Then with a pounding roar the hoss carrying the dead man comes along. The dead man sits up straight as you or me. His head swings around. He's trying to spy me. There's a penny piece over each dead eye. He uster pass at a distance. But each time now he passes closer. In last night's dream I could a reached up and touched his stirrup. So I knew I was the man to help Mrs. Strong make Gorhamtown town."

"That's a mighty poor kind of a dream to have," uneasily remarked Dresser. "And I can't see as it 'mounts to anything one way or t'other."

"It'll amount to something for me when he drops the coins from his eyes. Probably one coin from one eye—and looks down into my face."

He shivered as if cold.

"No one should believe in dreams," muttered Burnham, brushing the mosquitoes from his big nose.

"I do. In that one. If he'd got an eye on me in that last dream I'd be lying dead back there on the hummock by this time. As it is I'm safe and sound and ready to finish my business over beyond the Saco. I was starting out when I found Mrs. Strong waiting for her grist at Capisic mill and worrying about getting back to her little girl."

"You'd more than been repaid if you'd seen the little girl waiting for her mother," Burnham told him. "And if you're traveling beyond the Saco you might as well go along with Dresser and me. Only we're aiming to cross the river in a southwest course from here and don't plan to pass through any of the shore settlements."

"Why, that suits my plan exactly. It's the course I'd take from here if traveling alone. I've got to fetch up at Ezra Pringle's cabin three miles beyond the river. His niece went to live with him this spring. I took her up there, and I've worried ever since. She's an orphan and has had a hard time. She knew Pringle lived down this way if still living he might be. And she started a year ago to find him. Wintered in York and got word of him. Come on to Black Point early this spring. Happened to hear about her and, the dream being all right, I took her up the river. Tried to git him to come back to the coast with her, but he says the Injuns are his friends. Known 'em for a long time and never harmed one. Says they won't hurt him."

"Friends!" scoffed Dresser. "Phinney at Gorhamtown just ahead met an Injun he'd known from boy up. Good friends always. And he had to kill the Injun or be killed. Same with young Greeley when a 'friend' crawled toward him when he was hoeing corn and had left his musket by a stump. Greeley pretended not to see the rascal and hoed his way to the gun. They fought and Greeley killed his 'friend'."

"You don't have to prove anything to me," reminded Jessraday. "But ain't we close enough to the settlement to turn about and be off?"

Mrs. Strong, riding a short distance in advance, halted and shrilly called back:

"You folks have bothered enough. We're right on the edge of the settlement. Don't come farther less you want to."

They could smell the smoke and an eighth of a mile would bring them in sight of the cabins. Burnham would have enjoyed witnessing the transformation in the little girl when she saw her mother, and yet he knew there would be poignant pathos in the reunion.

"Then we'll say good-by here, ma'am," he decided. "Don't go after meal again when the Injuns are out in this neighborhood."

"Sha'n't less I have to. Traveling two nights is awful fretsome. But I've done mighty well by this trip. If I can get my scalp-money I'll buy enough meal to last a whole year. I'll always remember how kind you've been, Nahum Jessraday. And you other men, too. Don't think about that dream, Nahum. You probably won't have it again."

"So long as he don't see me I don't care. I sha'n't ever forgit how that red critter slumped into the water after you belted him over the head with the piece of chain. I'll have many a laff over that."

The woman sighed and told him:

"I like to think it's a teeny bit toward paying 'em off for killing my man. Tell old man Pringle for me that he's a fool."

CHAPTER III

EZRA PRINGLE'S CABIN

THEY camped for the night on the bank of a brook that flowed under a roof of green branches. During the last half mile of travel Burnham had knocked some pigeons from their low roosting place, and they risked a small fire for broiling these. Burnham had salt and Dresser contributed the last of the cornbread. The three believed that by midday on the morrow they would be at the Pringle cabin where they could renew their stock of supplies.

Jessraday, assured he was immune from violent death until the galloping dead man had shaken the coins from his eyes, was hungry for adventure and inclined to regret he must separate from his companions and take the girl to the coast settlements while they went on through Massachusetts to join the Canada expedition.

"If Pringle will see his duty and take the girl down to Saco, I'm thinking I'll poke along with you two. That is, if the dream don't change."

"If it changes it don't make any difference where you go, according to your notions," argued Dresser. "As for me I've been cramped up in settlements so long I'd keep on going, no matter what happens. I'm keen to follow the Saco to its head and find a new path through the mountains and through New Hampshire. More'n a hundred years ago Darby Field went to the source of the Saco above the Big Notch.* What he done alone three men could do and travel farther."

The suggestion keenly appealed to Burnham's inclination. It stirred his imagination. He was quite familiar with western Massachusetts and the Lake Champlain country, and he had seen enough of the district of Maine to feel the urge to trace some of its forest-lined rivers to their heads. In a general way he knew the Saco wound down from its high birthplace through the meadows of the Pequawkets and the ancient intervale homes of the Sokoki. But he had seen the stream only in crossing it in traveling through the coast settlements. Rivers for him had personalities. He pictured the Saco as being partial to its red children. Its drowsy summer song was for them.

Even if blunted by rough faring, there persisted something of the poet in his makeup, and he endeavored to put something of his thoughts in words. His companions did not understand and Jessraday bluntly remarked that a river was a river and that was all there was to it. Dresser sighed reminiscently and insisted there were no rivers in Maine to compare with the Merrimac, and he based his claim on the schools of mackerel to be had in the old days from that stream. Jessraday accepted the challenge and declared for the lordly Penobscot. An argument was avoided when Burnham reminded that the Canadian French and their Indian allies knew the heads of the

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*Crawford's.

Penobscot, Kennebec, Androscoggin and Saco better than did the Maine settlers.

And yet the first settlers, keeping close to the coast, had felt the lure and tug of curiosity and had wished to learn whence came the rivers. Often they turned their gaze to the blue silhouette of the range and wondered what kind of a country was up there. They knew there must be amiable little valleys and broad intervales as well as rugged notches. Had Burnham been foot-free, instead of returning from his Excellency's errand, and anxious to join the troops assembling for the conquest of all Canada, he would have commenced exploring where Darby Field had left off.

"Some time, if I live, I'm going to spend a summer and fall looking over this north country," he mumbled. "But I wouldn't miss going to Quebec for anything."

"I'm keen to go to Quebec, but can't see the use of walking to northern New York to git started. Why not start from Boston?" asked Dresser.

"We'd have to make it by water. Packed in province snows,* most of us sick. At the mouth of the St. Lawrence we'd be joined by the English regulars from Gibraltar, and then more sailing up the St. Lawrence. I'm no sailor. I won't be sick in a boat when I can walk. So I'll go with the men from New York and the southern colonies. Down the Champlain and the Richelieu, within reach of land any minute. When I face death I want to feel the solid ground under my feet."

"Cool sea breezes are better'n being shut in here in this tunnel with dratted flying bugs sucking the life-blood out of you," grumbled Jessraday. "But what's the good of me talking. I've got to take that girl back to the settlements if old Pringle sticks to his crazy notions."

The woods were warm and close and they suffered much from insects despite the liberal coatings of grease applied to hands and face. What was four or five miles in a direct line had been stretched to double the distance by their winding from side to side to avoid fallen timber, pools of stagnant water and patches of swamp. For countless ages trees had been growing and dying and falling. They sank knee deep in climbing over dead monarchs that crumbled beneath their feet. The forest floor was composed of the dust of these ancients. Other tangles of fallen trees were dangerous to cross because of their broken and sharp-pointed branches, and the bulk of their interlaced trunks sometimes were twenty or more feet in height.

Jessraday heaped green stuff on the coals of the small fire and crouched in the stifling smoke to escape the mosquitoes. Burnham questioned the wisdom of making the smudge, but his companions scoffed at the idea of danger from the survivors of the fight at the pool. Nor were there any alarms that night although they stood watch in turn.

The morning was misty yet promising to be fair and very warm. As they were within a few miles of the Saco they decided to defer breakfast until reaching the river. The little brook was their guide and after following it for half a mile Burnham hurled his ax and delighted his companions by knocking over a turkey, a noble bird, all gold and purple bronze, and weighing close to thirty pounds.

"Your father never bagged better in the old days," remarked Burnham to Dresser as he held up the prize.

"Plenty as pigeons 'round all the Massachusetts settlements seventy years ago, only they was much heftier," insisted Dresser. "I can remember when four pence would buy a forty-pounder. Now folks have tamed 'em and keep flocks 'round their houses. What I'm hankering for is lobsters and oysters. Oyster beds kept ships out of the Charles river. They'd measure a foot long. Times have changed and for the worse. My father carried on the Lord's good work when he marched with John Mason and helped burn the Pequot village on the Mystic. That was a rare killing of the heathen, and that's the best way to handle 'em."

"I've sometimes wondered if it was the best way," mused Burnham. "Boston had a great fright after that killing when King Philip took the field."

Dresser halted and rubbed the mosquitoes from his greasy face and indignantly exclaimed:

"Great land! You're as bad as Roger Williams when he said our king couldn't parcel out land in America without first buying it of the savages. I'm disappointed in you, young man. You're talking against the General Court of Massachusetts. Why, you're even talking against the Almighty! We have our warrant in the Bible. Genesis, first chapter. Verse twenty-eight—'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it.' How do you and Roger Williams git 'round that? My father heard John Mason say, after burning seven hundred Pequots, that God was 'seen in the Mount that day, crushing his proud enemies.' I don't like the way you talk, Burnham. Sounds like you was an Injun lover."

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*Equipped with two masts, resembling main and fore masts of a ship; with a third small mast abaft mainmast, carrying a try-sail.

"—— the Indians! I'm out to kill them," harshly replied Burnham. "I've seen considerable of their work. We'd had trouble with the French Indians no matter how well we treated the New England tribes. But while we were taking their land and burning their villages the Dutch—the English after them—were living in peace with the Iroquois. No forts, no staying awake nights, no cabins burned. Maybe if the general court had turned to the teachings of Christ it would have found a different ruling."

"Hush. Let's not quarrel," urged Jessraday. "I believe with Dresser, but I believe you mean well, young man. You've got a soft place in your head and speak without thinking."

"All right. Leave it that way. I hear the river, and we must be looking sharp."

The soft murmuring of the Saco was now audible through the woods. The stream was idling after its violent escape from the mountains. A grouse was drumming a belated reveille. A squirrel scampered recklessly over his aerial path. The travelers glimpsed a deer slipping through the growth on their right and they itched to add venison to their larder. Unseen and moving as softly as a ghost a bear left his drinking place across the brook.

The intruders moved on in silence and came to the river bank. An otter plumped into the water and swam for home. Both banks were heavily wooded, and down stream where the water-road vanished around a bend, there was the white water of rapids. This clear and rapid river needs must hurry for much of its journey to the sea as it drops nearly two thousand feet in about a hundred and forty miles of travel. Its resting places are not many, and in the spring and fall it is often transformed into a raging torrent, rising from ten to twenty-five feet. Before the mills of the white man came, no waters were more pure, more transparent; and, in the sunlight, never was water more blue. And no river could flow through such a sequence of varied scenic beauty.

BURNHAM sat on the bank and dressed the turkey and stared longingly at the translucent depths. Dresser hunted for fuel which would give off the least smoke and made a fire. Jessraday did what Burnham longed to do. He stripped and plunged and grunted and splashed in huge content. Burnham divided the turkey and transfixed the portions on green spits, ready for broiling, once the fire was reduced to a bed of coals. Then he started to pull off his hunting shirt.

Dresser advised:

"Better wait. One at a time."

"That's right. Yet there's no sign of Indians."

And he swept his gaze up and down the wooded banks and stared longingly at the drowsy current.

Jessraday kept submerged much of the time as his head was covered with mosquitoes and black flies the moment it appeared above water.

The two men on the bank watched him for several minutes, with Burnham impatient to take his turn. Dresser finally remarked:

"Must a been a cloud-bust up in the mountains. River's rising. There comes a log."

The section of a dead tree idly rounded the bend above and slowly shifted from the west to the east bank as the current veered toward the small cove where the travelers were preparing their breakfast. It floated by the fire and its protruding branches soon anchored it in the shallows a dozen feet from the bank. Jessraday swam to it and called out, "Pitch pine. It'll burn like tinder."

He would have tugged it ashore and up to the fire had not Burnham told him: "We have wood enough. Suppose you come ashore and feed the mosquitoes while I take my turn."

Jessraday reluctantly scrambled up the bank and hurried into his clothes and commenced tending the spits. Burnham was soon in the water, a cloud of insects enveloping his tall, lean figure until he escaped them by diving.

Dresser developed an itch for a swim and at last urged Burnham to give him his turn.

"Come along in. No Injuns around here," replied Burnham.

Dresser started to undress but Jessraday reminded:

"We'd better stick to the 'riginal bargain. One man in the water at a time. Your own words."

Dresser growled in his beard and stared malevolently at Burnham. The latter finally decided he was being selfish and turned on his back for a final splash. Then he delayed further by calling out:

"Another log coming. If the river is likely to rise, we'd better cross and camp on the other side. I'll get that log before it grounds and floats our clothes over.

This piece of driftwood, frilled with dead branches, resembled a giant porcupine as it sluggishly came down the stream. Its course was more direct than the first log as it did not meander across the river on rounding the upper bend.

"You fellows strip after we've eaten and we'll swim across. I'll eat my breakfast in the water."

He stood waist deep and brought his hands together above his head for an underwater plunge to meet the log.

"For —— sake, don't!" fiercely murmured Dresser before Burnham could dive. "It floats too low for pine, and it is a pine. It wan't carried across the bend like t'other."

Burnham swayed back and forth, his hands still above his head and murmured—

"It's a pine all right."

"And something else. Come ashore, you young fool. Come careless like!"

Jessraday lounged to where the guns were stacked against a tree. Burnham glanced sharply at the slowly approaching trunk, but could discover nothing sinister in its appearance except that it floated a trifle low. That it had been hung up high by some freshet was suggested by the matted grass among its naked branches. The dead grass was bleached to a yellowish white. He knew it must have been hung up for several seasons for the grass to accumulate, and as yet the river showed no crest of rising water. Instead of swimming to meet it, he ended his swaying by throwing himself on his back and kicking inshore.

Jessraday suddenly snatched up a gun, and as he did so something stirred under the dead grass on the upstream end of the log, and there came an explosion that set the grass afire and a heavy musket ball ploughed into the bark of a maple beside which Dresser was standing.

Jessraday returned the fire. Instantly there followed a commotion; swirls and underwater disturbances, as if the log were an aquatic monster and was kicking with many legs. Then it swung sidewise across the current.

"Alive with Injuns!" yelled Dresser, aiming a gun at the end nearest the bank, but holding his fire.

By this time Burnham was up the bank and had secured his gun. Jessraday, behind a tree, was proceeding with the slow work of reloading. There was a swirl close inshore, and a copper hand and arm appeared for a moment as the hidden swimmer endeavored to get under the overhanging bank. Dresser fired, and an Indian popped upright, waist deep and with his left arm shattered. He was in sight but for a moment; then he was diving and swimming away unseen.

The log swung on, now parallel to the bank. Burnham watched eagerly and waited for Jessraday to announce his gun was reloaded. Not until a hand flashed into view in midstream did he realize the occupants of the floating ambush had quit the log and were making for the opposite bank. Three heads bobbed above the surface for a few moments, but while Burnham believed he could score a hit he did not empty his gun until one of his companions had finished loading. For there was the chance at least one savage had remained with the log, waiting to make a kill while all the white guns were empty. And there was even a greater danger of other savages stealing along the bank to attack the camp from the woods.

He called out for his companions to watch the timber. He kept his own gaze on the placid river. The three heads were now under water. Jessraday announced his gun was loaded. But the river was kind to its first children, and its overhanging foliage permitted the swimmers to gain the bank and crawl up and into the woods, unseen by the white men.

"We oughter got 'em all!" cried Dresser.

"Mighty lucky you didn't let us all take the water at once, mister," said Jessraday.

"Lucky for me you kept me from swimming to meet that log," added Burnham. "I'm ashamed of myself. Such an old trick! Sending down an empty log first."

"We done fair to middling well," declared Dresser, pleased by his companions' words. "We're alive and they lost their guns and can't fight for a while. One of 'em has a busted arm. Let's cross and chase 'em."

And he put aside the gun to pick up the scythe and run a critical thumb along the edge of the blade.

"We must cross," agreed Burnham as he hurriedly dressed. "But to hunt for them will be a waste of time and a great risk. They'll have friends near here. Even now they may be waiting for us. I shall be surprized if a parcel of them ain't trailing us before sundown. We must travel hard and fast."

"We can easy make Ezra Pringle's cabin before dark," said Jessraday. "We can fort ourselves there till it's safe to move on. We'll fall back into the woods a bit, then go down stream a mile and cross."

Dresser grumbled:

"You folks are forgitting the turkey. I don't budge an inch till I've eaten."

Fortunately the turkey was partly cooked, on the outside at least, and without further waiting the three crouched by the coals and devoured their portions.

Covered by the growth they hastened down stream until well below the shallow rapids when they crossed by wading and swimming, one arm holding powder horns and gun above the water. They separated on leaving the water and crawled into the woods at different points. Coming together, they took time to review their adventure and the daring of the savages. They agreed that the Indians behind the floating log were members of a big scout and had happened to discover the morning fire. They also believed the main body was somewhere on the river, and presumably upstream.

"We'll be dogged," predicted Jessraday as they filed through the damp woods with him leading the way.

"We can bite," mumbled Dresser, who was annoyed by the inconvenience of carrying both scythe and gun, but stubbornly refusing to abandon the latter.

"Let them come and be ——!" muttered Burnham, as the insect pests aroused him to a homicidal rage. "How can a naked Micmac stand these bloody plagues!"

THEY proceeded at a rapid walk and were often deflected from a straight course. Visibility was poor compared with that in pine growths and clean open oak timber. Yet an hour passed without any signs of pursuit or of any trail of an enemy scouting party.

Jessraday halted and relaxed and slapped his mosquito-covered face smartly and announced:

"Guess we were mistook. Those Injuns must have come from a band that was far up the river."

"But the gun-fire would carry far," reminded Burnham.

"Well, we haven't seen a sign yet, and we'll soon be at Pringle's cabin," replied Jessraday. "He built in a small natural opening where the rocky soil made the timber weak-rooted, and it blew down. By deadening and burning he's doubled his cleared land. When he put up his cabin the sun didn't reach him till after ten o'clock in the morning, and was gone by three in the afternoon. When I fetched his niece up here early in the spring he said he'd added three hours of sunlight. Guess he's the only man in the district who can live out during an Injun war and not be sculped. He told David Libby at his garrison on Scottow's Hill outside of Scarborough that he'd discovered the essence of peace and couldn't be hurt."

"Trouble is, the Indians haven't discovered it," said Burnham. "Yet they may let him alone. They will if they think he's crazy. I'm being eaten alive."

"In a minute or two," encouraged Jessraday as he took the lead. "I can hear him at work."

Burnham threw up his head and heard a dull note, much like the striking of a club against a log. He was puzzled to classify it. Dresser was quick to identify the sound, and said:

"Pringle ain't much scared, that's a fact. Calmly pounding corn into meal. That Injun mortar carries like a drum."

Burnham was ashamed that he had not interpreted the pounding noise. He had often heard a corn mortar. Trailing their guns, they pressed forward and saw the light filtering into the timber ahead. They halted at the edge of a rough clearing. The cabin stood on a small, rocky knoll. Piles of charred logs and mounds of ashes showed where Pringle had burned his way to the sunlight. The woods were heavy with summer foliage and yet the edge of the growth for almost the entire circumference of the clearing wore the aspect of winter in that the branches were bare and bleakly outlined against the blue sky. This skeleton appearance resulted from hermit's work in deadening the timber. The trees had been girdled the year before. Corn already was planted among them. In another season they could be felled and burned.

It was the old story of conflicting interests. From the red hunter's point of view the forest must ever remain a covert for moose, deer and other game. To the white man it was a hinderance and a menace. It must be cleared before crops could grow. The mills would freight the river with sawdust, and the fish would desert them.

In times of war the forests afforded protection to the enemy. Unseen, the French and Indians came down from Canada over the ancient water-trails formed by the interlocking headwaters of the Chaudiere and the Kennebec. Short portages from the valley of the latter gave easy access to the Androscoggin and the Penobscot. Sometimes war parties came by the Chaudiere and Du Loup to the Penobscot and Moosehead Lake, thence to the Kennebec. In such an instance the return was usually made by Dead River and Lake Megantic. After leaving their canoes, they could approach within pistol-shot of a settlement without their presence being suspected.

So there was a double incentive behind every "deadening" and "burn" to provide a planting ground and to eliminate skulking places for the enemy. Throughout the district of Maine families were praying for an early winter, when the foliage would fall from the hardwoods and the red hordes would cease their raids. And winter on the northeastern border was never a comfortable season. The icy winds whistled through crevices, and the sap froze as it oozed from the ends of logs blazing in the fireplace.

"I can see him," murmured Jessraday, his sober countenance relaxing in a smile. "Now I'm wondering what he'll say to having the girl go back to the settlements! Maybe he won't like it. Maybe she won't leave him. I vum! I'd never give that a thought!"

Through the small square hole that served as a window Dresser and Burnham could glimpse bowed head and shoulders. Slowly and regularly the arms rose and fell, and the pestle striking the bottom of the mortar gave forth its hollow sound.

Burnham seized Jessraday's arm and gently held him back from leaving the growth, and whispered:

"But the girl? I don't see her."

"Probably inside with some piece of work or outdoors on t'other side of the cabin."

"While the Injuns may be friendly enough with Pringle and his niece it doesn't follow they'll be friendly to us," argued Burnham. "Suppose you two wait here a bit before showing yourselves? I'll scout around the place and make sure the woods are clear."

"Ain't an Injun within miles of here," impatiently said Jessraday. "If there was you'd see them loafing 'round the cabin. But if you're nervous we can make the door on the run."

"I am a little nervous," confessed Burnham. "I haven't discovered any 'essence of peace.' I never enter a cabin in a clearing in wartime without scouting the woods first. There's no hurry."

"Git along with your scouting," snapped Dresser. "But don't waste any time."

BURNHAM glided away, keeping well covered, intending to make a complete circuit of the clearing. He had not advanced a rod, however, before he heard Jessraday say:

"Then stay here and wait. No reason why I shouldn't go ahead. There's no danger."

"But I'd like to see some signs of the young woman," replied Dresser.

"On the other side of the cabin enjoying the last of the sunlight."

Burnham ran back before Jessraday could more than show himself in the clearing. He angrily demanded:

"Why does your friend pound corn indoors when he can do it in the open? Why does the sound of his pounding carry so far if there is corn in the mortar? I tell you, Jessraday, I don't like it."

"That's your nerves trying to scare you," warned Dresser. "I'm cautious as any one, but you're fetching trouble that don't exist."

"Good land! I should say so!" cried Jessraday. "How do I know why his mortar isn't full of corn? Probably because he's about out of corn. There's Pringle. I could tell his old muskrat hat anywhere. Girl's probably on t'other side in the sunlight. That's where I'd be if I had to live here. You act like you was almost scared."

"That may be his hat. But it's a warm day for a man to be wearing his hat in the house."

"Nerves git strung too high," commented Dresser.

"——, man! I haven't any nerves. But we've shown ourselves," growled Burnham.

"I want to show you what's under that old muskrat hat," cried Jessraday with a hearty laugh. And he advanced into the clearing and whistled softly.

The figure at the window ceased working and slowly shuffled to the door, the shoulders stooped and the head bowed. After a brief pause he waved a hand in greeting and turned back to his task.

"There!" cried Jessraday. "I could tell them deerskin breeches in the king's palace. Come along."

And he started on a trot for the cabin.

Burnham followed Jessraday, but Dresser loitered behind, troubled by Burnham's words. He had detected nothing suspicious, although one who did not know Pringle to be an eccentric man would have wondered at his failure to leave the cabin and greet his guests. And Dresser had expected the man's niece to come running to meet them. But if she was on the other side of the cabin and had not heard Jessraday's low whistle, her non-appearance would be explained.

The old man advanced slowly, carrying his scythe in his hands with his musket tucked under his arm. He had not considered it to be necessary to scout the woods before approaching the cabin. Nor could he now see any reason for so doing, although he was ready to endorse too much caution rather than to risk the slightest negligence. Two Indian wars had taught him to take but little for granted. His disquiet, therefore, was nebulous, and the very fact he could not point out a possible danger added to his uneasiness.

His companions were now advancing at a walk and Dresser increased his pace. The pestle was rising and falling with monotonous regularity. Pringle's bowed form did not shift its position, and the hollow noise from the mortar was carrying far. Then Dresser suddenly experienced a great fear. He could not analyze it beyond a vague expectation that something terrible was about to happen.

He halted and stared about the quiet clearing, then turned his gaze back to the mechanical figure dimly framed in the small window. Jessraday was within a dozen feet of the door. The bowed figure straightened and turned about as if to voice a welcome. Then the old man was paralyzed to behold the brown barrel of a musket suddenly protrude through the window. Burnham's gun exploded first by half a second.

Jessraday, who had been looking at the low doorway, jerked his head about unconscious of the narrowness of his escape, and screamed:

"Good ——! You've killed Ezra Pringle!"

"Come on the run, Dresser!" shouted Burnham over his shoulder. "Inside, Jessraday, you fool! It's our one chance!"

With the spell broken, Dresser ran nimbly. From the woods on the other side of the cabin rose a chorus of howls. Jessraday tripped and fell headlong through the doorway. Burnham, bowed half double to escape the lintel log, leaped over him with his ax clutched in his right hand. Finding no foe to dispute their entrance Burnham snatched up his companion's loaded gun and wheeled to the door to cover Dresser's approach. Now the latter was running like a young man and fairly hurled himself into the cabin and slammed and barred the door while Burnham was fitting a thick oak shutter over the window.

Then the three took time to look about. The room was in semi-darkness except for a blade of light that found ingress at one end of the shutter. This ray fell on a savage face, one half of which was painted red and the other half painted black. The muskrat hat had fallen from the head and the scalp was shaved back to the topknot.

"That's a Sokoki man," whispered Dresser. "Where's Pringle?"

"And his poor niece?" gasped Jessraday.

"Look under the blankets!" hoarsely commanded Burnham as he devoted his attention to spying through the crevice at the window.

"Oh, Lord! Here's poor Ezra!" exclaimed Jessraday. "Killed by an ax and stripped of his clothes."

"Cover him up," muttered Dresser. "He's found peace."

Burnham kicked over the empty mortar and told Jessraday:

"Your dead man nearly got his eyes on you that time. Watch from the back side. Dresser, take my place at the window while I load."

"But the girl?" whispered Dresser.

"God knows! And only He can save her!"

"To think Poor Pringle trusted them!" sighed Jessraday as he searched the back wall.

"It's worse to think his foolish faith has brought death to the girl," muttered Burnham. "What do you see, Jessraday? They've stopped yelling."

"I'm making a peep-hole. Poor Pringle didn't have need of them."

The woods were silent. Burnham finished reloading and also charged the Sokoki's gun. Dresser at the shuttered window could discover no signs of the lurking foe. Jessraday dug mud from between the logs and announced:

"Now I can see fine. Not a red hide in sight. Maybe there was only a few and they've run off."

A piece of bark fell on Burnham's hand. He glanced up warily, he touched his friends lightly on the shoulder and whispered—

"One's on the roof!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

A HISTORICAL MYTH

by Faunce Rochester

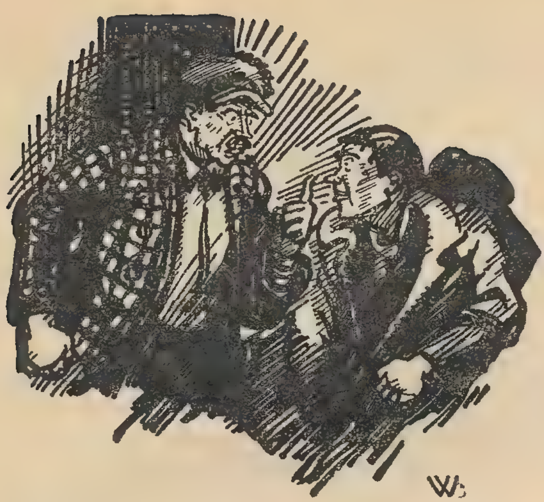
INTERMITTENTLY there appears in the public press mention of a band of white Indians. Corondo heard tell of them in what is now western Texas about the middle of the sixteenth century. Forty years later he was among the Zuni and heard much of the Hopi country, which he failed to reach because of the snow in the mountains. Rev. Z. N. Morrell, who was a missionary in Texas as early as 1836, met a tribe of Indians he calls the "Munchies," an old plains name for the Hopi. He describes them as being white Indians.

The early Spanish explorers accepted them as white Indians. Other travelers gave them the name of the "Welsh" Indians, it being a Welsh legend that Prince Madoc of Wales discovered a new world in 1170 and returned and led some of his people there and was never heard of thereafter. This fallacy endured well into the nineteenth century. The white Indians the Spaniards came in contact with were doubtless albinos of the Zuni. The missionary's "Munchies" were albinos of the Hopi. Albinos were especially numerous among the Hopi. The men of these two southwestern tribes naturally possessed black hair, but the albinos' hair was often wavy and brown, their eyes were light.

Many of the Mandans on the upper Missouri had light hair and eyes; and Catlin to the extent of a chapter favored the theory that the Mandans were the lost Welsh tribe. Custer in his "My Life on the Plains," thought he found traces of the Gaelic in Indian speech. In "Drake's Book of the Indians," 1833, second edition, the author finds in the name of Madokawando, chief of the Penobscot tribe in King Philip's War, a similarity to that of Madoc, the Welsh prince. He says—

"The story of white Indians speaking Welsh, on the Missouri river, has gained supporters in former and latter periods."

Years of close study and observation by trained observers have proven the entire absence of any linguistic relation between any of the Indian tongues and those of the Old World. "White" Indians are either albinos or the result of the introduction of white blood. One tribe of Apaches was well bleached out because of the many white prisoners they adopted from Mexico.



JAM

By L. Paul

Author of "Me—Ali," "Bulldog," etc.

BILL STEVENS was baling muskrat skins. It was late April. In a day or two he and his partner "Flatfoot" Hawkins would start south with their winter's catch and discover anew the perennial fact that fur buyers have hard hearts and harder heads. But just now old Bill was enjoying himself, after his fashion; knocking the wedges out of the stretchers of the last few pelts; drawing out the thin split boards; turning the cased skins back right side to and laying them end for end on the neat square pile.

He had been at the job only a few minutes, having just come back with Flatfoot to the main cabin after a final trip to the smaller shack at the other end of their trapping grounds. Flatfoot himself was down at the river getting water.

"Ninety-five, ninety-six—" Bill went on with his job. "Ninety-seven—and a big one at that, the granddaddy of all rats. If fur buyers was human this'd count as two. Ninety—" he paused as Flatfoot came in with his bucket of water. "Now don't ye go distractin' me with convesation," Bill warned him. "I figger on makin' a proper count o' these skins. It don't pay to tell a guy you're offerin' a hundred pelts and then have him find ninety-nine, an' as for the harrowin' chances o' givin' him a hundred an' two—well, it ain't done. No, sir, I'm perticler to make my words and deeds jibe. If you get contradicted out o' your own mouth, so to speak, them buyers is apt to look close for holes and cuts and then where are ye? Ninety-seven—"

"I'm not conversin'."

Flatfoot set the bucket down.

His eye traveled over the cabin. He was a big man. His shoulders had the square set that only army drill gives.

"I'm only wonderin'."

"Ninety-eight—" Bill paid no heed to him.

"I'm wonderin'—" Flatfoot repeated, "where's that—"

"Shut up or I'll get mixed." Bill reached for another skin. "Ninety-nine. Want us to lose money?"

"If you haven't got the answer to this here riddle we've lost it," Flatfoot went on, determined to be heard. "You're smart, you are, saving one skin in a count of a hundred. But where's the other bale?"

Old Bill dropped skin and stretcher to the floor.

"Where's the—what the—" he goggled round the cabin.

Furs were everywhere, some baled, some loose; mink, otter, fox, odd skins of other varieties; but one particular pack was missing, a square, well-built bundle of muskrat pelts which he had done up himself not twenty-four hours before.

"Ay, where is the other bale o' muskrat?" Flatfoot repeated. "You count them perishin' pretty, like a —— magician. Now you see 'em and now you don't."

Old Bill scratched his head.

"'Smatter of fact they ain't here," he admitted.

"Ain't here! Ain't here!" Flatfoot Hawkins, slow to anger, had by now begun to get mad. "We takes a day off to close the upper camp and a perishin' bounder steals our muskrat pelts and you stand there sayin' 'They ain't here,' like the general public when a magician vanishes the eggs. 'Ain't here'— You watch me. I'll 'ain't here' the bozo that run off with them." He reached for his rifle on the wall rack and made for the door.

OLD BILL caught him at the threshold.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"I'm goin' to take a shot at the man that stole our furs," Flatfoot announced. "I'll make for the Stoppin' Place and as soon as I cast eyes on a man with a nice square-built pack o' pelts I'll plug lead into him, that I will."

"You danged long streak o' fool excitement." Bill grabbed the rifle barrel with both hands. "I s'pose the woods ain't full o' folks that pack furs. I s'pose there ain't a dozen honest folks portagin' their own stuff to market these days."

He paused, for he knew that Flatfoot's brain worked slowly. He wanted to give him time.

"You'd plug the first man you saw, would you?" he went on. "Well, go to it, Flatfoot Hawkins. They shot 'em in the army, so you've told me, but in these here parts they strings murderin' sharpshooters up by the neck. Not that you'd make a poor figger, strung proper; 'cause with them long legs and goose neck you'd stretch right pretty. But—well, I kind o' like you, so I'll take this popgun away and give ye a bit of advice."

"Advice won't bring them pelts back," Flatfoot submitted sulkily.

"Mebbe not." Bill leaned the rifle against the wall. "But how you goin' to pin that crime on any perticler yellow-bellied robber?"

"You'd let him get away with it?" Flatfoot asked gloomily.

"I ain't the sort to waste time on foolishness," Bill explained. "If 'twas still winter we could track him—but, shucks, even a tenderfoot'd know he couldn't get away with this in winter. And now with most o' the snow gone, what chance have we o' catching the thief? None. And as for squattin' down at Danby's Stoppin' Place to wait for him, I tell ye that it's useless. The man what took'em wouldn't go out that way. He'd strike west where them lumbermen was cruisin', or east where they're cuttin' ties for the new railroad. And if you think you can cover the map o' the north country fast enough to catch up with him, go to it. Me, I takes this as a visitation o' Providence, and that means takin' it meek and submissive. And them's my sentiments."

"All right, all right." Flatfoot dropped to his knees and began to examine the floor. "Only they're not mine. I'm British, I am; and I tell you, Bill Stevens—and laugh if you will—when the British bulldog gets his jaws set, he don't let go."

He slipped his hand over a small object he had discovered, thrust it into his pocket, then rose to face his smiling old partner.

"And what may you be a-laughing at?" asked Flatfoot Hawkins, truculently, "you patient perishin' meek old blighter!"

"Stop bitin' air, you British bulldog. Let go o' the wind a minute and pass me the arnicy. I got rheumatism in this old leg o' mine." Bill tried to change his smile into a grimace of pain, for he saw now that his partner was getting his Irish up. "And forget about them pelts. They comes out o' my share if it suits ye, Flatfoot."

But big Flatfoot was still playing bulldog. He had taken hold. He refused to let go.

"You needn't rub that arnicy on so wasteful, Bill Stevens. You don't fool me. Dumb I am, but earnest, and it ill befits you to laugh at me. And as for the perishin' piker that stole them muskrat pelts, I'll have them back or I'll bring ye a new hide instead—with human hair to it. And that's that."

"Go to it, Hawkshaw. Mebbe you got a clue. Mebbe you found a red hair or somethin' on the floor. What was it ye took up so secret and stuck in your pocket, Flatfoot?"

"If you'd acted sympathetic you'd ha' seen it." Flatfoot still stood on his dignity. "But seein' how you're a scoffer and a mocker, I'll just keep it to myself. And now if you have no objections, I'm off."

"And where may you be going?" asked Bill Stevens.

"Where this here clue leads me." Flatfoot slipped out the door. "And you go right on countin' muskrat skins. Don't change the tally. I'll have them others back or my name ain't Flatfoot Hawkins."

"You're due to get christened fresh, old hoss," Bill Stevens gibed.

But when his partner had vanished he became serious.

"The blamed idjit means trouble," he thought. "Reckon this neck o' woods is full o' honest men that's due to be misunderstood considerable. For he can't cotch the man that stole the stuff, and he's too blamed enthusiastic to come home without skinnin' his game—is Flatfoot Hawkins, who's now huntin' human beings.

"And if there's a sensible way out, pleasin' to all parties consarned, innocent or guilty, I for one can't see it," finished Bill Stevens as he put the arnica bottle back on its shelf. "All the same, I'd like to know just what he picked up off'n that floor; I sure would."

That object, though old Bill did not know it, had all the earmarks of a clue. It was a small horseshoe-shaped plate of iron. Some millions of men had known what it meant to drag similar bits of metal over cobbled roads on the heels of British army boots. And Flatfoot Hawkins, cuddling it with one hand as he made for the river and his canoe, knew what that plate meant. The man who had worn the shoe had been a soldier in all probability, and ex-soldiers, he figured, should be scarce in the north country.

"AND so some skunk robbed ye," Danby, who kept the Stoppin' Place clucked sympathetically. "Well, there in't been nobody come out by water and the goin' is terrible hard by the trails these days. Only man I seen is this josser, Cunningham, who sets up by the stove dryin' hisself out."

"What happened to him?" Flatfoot asked. "And who is he?"

"Minin' man. Says he slipped over a ledge o' rock on the north slope yonder where he was prospectin'. Snow there yet, or was before he brung it down with him. Mite damp he is."

"Is that so?" Flatfoot caressed the iron plate in his pocket. "And what's he got on his feet?"

"Socks," Danby answered shortly. "But you don't suspect him, Flatfoot, do you? He ain't the sort to steal a man's pelts."

"In unravelin' crimes you go round suspectin' thorough," Flatfoot retorted sagely. "And when you finds the unlikeliest man you goes up and fits your clue to him. You tell me what he wore on his feet when he set out and how long he was gone, this minin' man, for I've a suspicion he struck pay dirt."

"He wore boots," Danby answered. "An' he moseyed out into them hills yonder at dawn an' he got back ten minutes ago, makin' eight hours away."

"You go get them boots," Flatfoot suggested. "I'm bettin' they're army issue. Go get 'em."

"That I'll not." Danby stiffened. "I'll play guessin' games with any grown-up kid that comes along, but insult a payin' customer I won't."

"You won't?"

"I'm —— if I will, Flatfoot Hawkins. This Cunningham is honest. He'd no more steal your furs than he'll find gold in them hills. So don't you go insultin' a guest in my hotel, small and informal though it be. And that's that."

"All right," Flatfoot agreed, somewhat disheartened. "Then I got to be diplomatic. That's what, eh?"

"You sure do," Danby answered. "Come on inside and meet him. Once you clap eyes on him you'll see how wrong you are to suspicion a poor boob like this minin' man, Cunningham."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute." Flatfoot grabbed him by the arm. "What kind o' jam you got in stock?"

"Trapper jam an' lumber jam," Danby replied.

"Which jam and what jam?"

"Trapper, which is mostly hand made with nature left out, an' lumber, which ain't so high in quality."

"And has this here Cunningham eat yet?"

"He ain't."

"Then you back my play," Flatfoot smiled reassuringly. "If this here Cunningham is innocent he won't be insulted none, and if he's the man who stole our pelts he ain't to be considered."

"I don't like this diplomatic stuff," Danby objected, "but I'll back your fool play, Flatfoot, so long as you don't insult no honest men. What you want?"

"Keep your ears open, say yes, and act accordin'," Flatfoot gave his brief commands.

"All right—but don't you go insultin' my payin' customer," Danby warned.

Together they entered the roughly built Stoppin' Place, Danby's combined store, home, and hotel. A tall, melancholy man sat by the stove drying his sock feet. He was long of face, long of limb, about thirty-five. He looked up as they entered.

"Good day to you." Flatfoot did not offer to shake hands. "Fine spell o' weather, chum, what?"

"Tophole," the tall, melancholy Cunningham agreed.

Flatfoot glanced meaningly at Danby. The stranger's accent went with British boots, right enough.

"Bit moist underfoot on them north slopes," Flatfoot went on. "Nothin' like good old English leather for keepin' the water out."

"None better," Cunningham agreed.

"An' of all English boots the army boots was best," Flatfoot proceeded, "and that bein' so—"

Cunningham looked puzzled. Was this stranger trying to start an argument?

"Don't mind Flatfoot here—he's fond of riddles," Danby put in nervously. "And Flatfoot, you mind your promise."

Flatfoot sighed. He liked direct methods, but his promise stood. However, there was still the diplomatic approach. He waved Danby behind the rude counter. Then turned to Cunningham.

"Hungry, chum?" he asked. "Supper won't be ready for a spell and me, I feel a bit peckish."

"This here hospitality is noble, comin' from you, Flatfoot." Danby, behind the counter, smiled his relief.

Flatfoot threw him a stern glance. "Got any biscuits?" he asked.

Cunningham raised his head.

"Biscuits'd go proper. Bit of all right," he agreed.

"And jam," Flatfoot added, turning to Danby. "Plum and apple jam? You got that?"

"Yes," Danby reached for a tub of jam with supersize strawberries on the glaring label.

Orders were orders. He had no plum and apple, and, though that label said a lot about not accepting substitutes it had no message about offering them.

"And now," Flatfoot grabbed the tub of jam—ten pounds of sticky apple and turnip sweetness—and a stack of cheap cookies. "Now, stranger, we'll have a bite to chew."

CUNNINGHAM shuddered. "—— forbid!" he moaned, waving Flatfoot aside.

"I thought so," Flatfoot roared. "Now, Mister Old Soldier, stand up and put up them hands, you crooked thief. I've got you to rights."

"What'n —— you mean?" Danby came bounding across the counter.

"I know what I know, and that's enough. I give him the test and he qualifies as army folks. And an old soldier done us out of our skins." Flatfoot shook Danby off. "Insult him, is it? I ain't insultin' nobody. If the truth insults him well and good. He can swallow it—or this," and he lunged at Cunningham who had risen.

"No scrappin' now, Flatfoot." Danby caught his arm as he struck. "No more insults—"

"Let be. Let be!" The melancholy Cunningham brought his arms up.

His eyes held a glint of cold fire. He was mad, clean through.

"I'm insulted right enough. Let him go. I'll 'jam' him—"

Danby obeyed. Two minutes later, however, he took it upon himself to interfere. Two minutes of hard fighting with the contestants on even terms and the end yet far out of sight was enough for Danby. It was too hard on his store.

"Stop it, stop it! This here jam war's over."

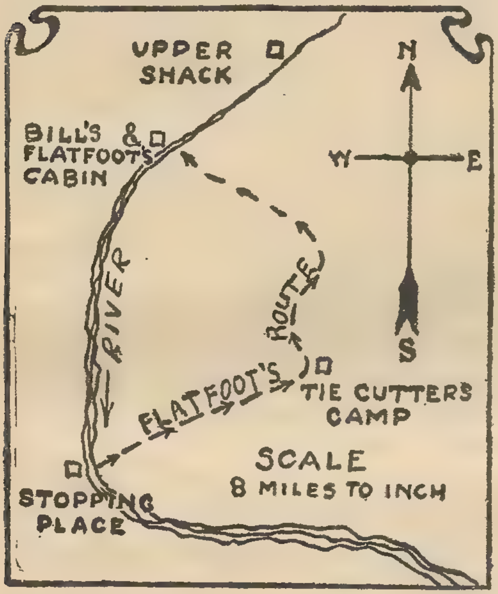
"The —— it is." Cunningham sought to dodge around him as he slipped between them—Cunningham whose nose bled and whose lips were oozing blood where Flatfoot had got home.

"It's —— near started, not stopped, you perishin'—"

Flatfoot Hawkins used the pause in hostilities to make a count of certain loose teeth, finding them, to his surprize, all present and correct.

"Stopped! That there's final." Danby was firm. "Now, Flatfoot, you been sayin' a heap of funny things about jam and army boots—"

"And more I can say at that," Flatfoot broke in. "Any fool knows how us old soldiers hated plum and apple jam. And it stands to reason that a man who talks like an Englishman and hates plum and apple's been in the army. And if in the army he'd have army boots—and if his boots was King George's issue, well, mebbe, he could fit this bit o' tin on the heel o' one o' them. What about it, Cunningham, what about it?” And he drew the iron heel-plate from his pocket. “Mebbe you seen this before? Mebbe when you stole our pack o' muskrat pelts you lost this—in our cabin.”



Cunningham grinned.

“So that's it? Well, Danby, peace's declared, that's what. I thought this smart chum was making game of me and talking jam personal—and he wasn't. He was only calling me a thief. Well, it's all the fault of my dirty disposition, me getting mad like I did.”

“Personal!” Flatfoot gasped. “He thought I was talking personal. Oh, you was an army man all right, chum. You swing a mean lead, you do—personal!”

“I never saw an army, much less was in one,” Cunningham explained patiently. “But jam! That's another horse, chum, another horse. A man that comes waving jam at me gets wars without no armies needed—”

“And why?” Flatfoot scoffed. “And why does jam mean war to a bloke like you?”

“Because I hate it,” Cunningham shuddered. “Because for five awful years I was a jam buyer in Montreal, wholesale jams, compotes, and conserves, pickles included—because I tasted the rotten stuff day after day till my guts went sour and I come north and learned prospectin'. And, strike me —— well pink, but the next man who so much as whispers ‘jam,’ I'll—”

“Hold on! Hold on!” Danby broke in apprehensively. “No pink perishin' for you. Them there sentiments is regarded hereabouts as the personal vice o' Flatfoot Hawkins. If you want to perish do it without a rainbow.”

“And you wasn't in no army? You ain't got army boots?” Flatfoot grinned, amicably, now.

“I was not. Bad eyes kep' me out, and them *bottes-sauvages* back of the stove is my footwear,” Cunningham explained. “But for why are you lookin' so hard and brutal for army men? Is there another war startin' and are you lookin' for recruits?”

Flatfoot explained at length about the loss he and Bill Stevens had sustained. He handed Cunningham the small plate of metal.

“And the perishin' bloke that lost that stole our muskrat pelts,” he concluded, “for I picked it up on the floor. And when I find him—”

“When we find him,” Cunningham put in. “This here bloke is an enemy o' mine.” He felt his wounds gingerly. “Seems to me this crook's untidiness has brought me the grandfather of a licking, and as to my stomach, the smell of that there jam has put me off my feed for a week, if not longer. So it's ‘we.’ You lead the way and I'll follow. There's only one boot to be found and hence only one man, but maybe we'll be lucky. Maybe he'll have a friend.”

Flatfoot thrust out his hand.

“Shake,” he said briefly.

Danby welcomed the happy conclusion of hostilities with a smile.

“A —— of a detective you are, Flatfoot,” he jibed.

“A perishin' competent sleuth I am, chum,” Flatfoot triumphed. “Most detectives gets nothin' but a headache out of a false scent, but me, I come out with another policeman. Now where might we find some blokes holed up? Any at the timber cruisers' outfit to the west o' here?”

“All Frenchies,” Danby answered.

“What about them tie cutters? Ain't they hangin' out ten mile or so east o' here?”

“Right you are,” Danby agreed. “But I don't know about blokes.”

"Danby," Flatfoot admonished him as he put the heel-plate back in his pocket, "you ain't up in nat'ral history. Me, I learned it from sad experience. Wherever you find an ax in this here —— country you find a new English bloke cuttin' hisself on it. Come on, Cunningham, we can make that there camp before midnight. That is if you're game."

"Game," Cunningham stood up and reached for his boots—tall *bottes-sauvages*, that had stood all the time on the other side of the stove. "Game is it? Do those tie cutters eat jam?"

"Barrels of it," Danby informed him.

"Then I hope it's a large camp." Cunningham drew on his boots. "I feel like war and I want war."

"And strike me —— well pink, war you'll have," Flatfoot promised as he led the way out.

IT WAS a small and a dirty cabin. The five tie cutters, bristle-faced men, sat around the table playing poker by the light of a single hanging lantern. Most of the money was in front of a little, rat-faced man who sat across the table from the door. They were a poor lot, cutting on shares; and they were not making a fortune at it. Outside the wind howled. It was cold for April. One of them rose, threw a log into the big sheet-iron stove, then paused to listen before sitting down again. He had heard voices outside, but he could not distinguish the words.

"Folks comin'," he grunted. "Hope it's sports."

"Might have liquor," another added speculatively.

"Open that door," a third put in. "Ought to welcome the blighters if so be they're bringin' booze."

"Let 'em knock," a fourth ordered—the boss of the outfit. "D'ye want to blow the heat out o' this dump?"

And outside on the rough logging road, Flatfoot Hawkins issued his final orders for the coming encounter.

"You opens the door smart," he commanded.

"I'll open her," Cunningham agreed.

"And you'll shout, 'Room 'shun! Orderly Officer'."

"And what then?" Cunningham asked.

"We lam —— out of whoever stands up straight and soldier-like," Flatfoot explained.

"What if they all stand up?" Cunningham asked.

"They all eats jam, I'll wager," Flatfoot suggested.

"That suits me," Cunningham tightened his belt. "I shout ''Shun! Orderly Officer.' We lam —— out of them that stand up like old soldiers, and then—"

"Then we tries this heel-plate on all and sundry boots till we finds the one it fits." Flatfoot finished his battle orders.

"And what if it don't fit?" Cunningham put in.

"Now I told you them jossers ate jam. If that isn't enough to make you fight, what'd you come for?" Flatfoot was willing to take the tie cutters on alone, but an ally would help. "Plum jam, apple jam, strawberry jam, gooseberry—"

"Shut up!" Cunningham stopped him, stepped toward the door. "I'm game." He swung it wide.

"Room 'shun! Orderly Officer!" he bawled.

Four of the five men inside jumped to their feet. The fifth slipped down below the table, disappearing as if by magic before Cunningham's eyes.

On the shelf across from the door were three wooden pails. Their labels betrayed them. They were jams, cheap jams. With a roar Cunningham went into action. One bound and he was in the middle of the room.

He grabbed one end of the short bench upon which the two tie cutters nearest had been sitting, swung it up and around. The two men sat down as one.

"Get up and fight," Cunningham cried. "You jam-hounds, try that on your bellies! Where are you, Flatfoot Hawkins? Want me to clean 'em all?"

"I'm comin'." Flatfoot's voice came from behind him. "Kick that one nearest you. He's drawin' a knife. He's goin' to cut hisself a slice o' bread and jam."

Cunningham obeyed. His ready foot caught the man on the wrist. The knife tinkled to the floor. The man slumped down, groaning.

Flatfoot came past him.

"Shock troops held up by unexpected force," he explained, as he leaped up on the table, then down upon the two men on its far side. "Take that, you —— robbers!"

He swung at the bigger of them. The

man guarded clumsily. Only now were the surprized tie cutters, poor stuff at best, getting their wits back. The two men whom Cunningham had struck with the bench were pretty well out of action, but the other two showed fight.

"Make it quick!" Flatfoot shouted. "Take the little one!"

"What'll I do with him?" Cunningham came round the table. "He's too small to hit. I'd bust him."

"Give him jam," Flatfoot suggested.

Cunningham took his orders literally. He reached up for a pail of sticky sweetness and upended it over the smaller man's head.

"That leaves one," Flatfoot sparred with the last survivor. "You watch them victims o' your wrath, brother Cunningham, till I wipe out the deacon o' this here chapel."

"I'm through. I'm thr—" Flatfoot's opponent spluttered as the big man's right crashed across his mouth.

Flatfoot eyed him suspiciously as he backed off.

"Set down," he commanded.

The man fumbled for a stool in the corner and squatted there.

"Watch them others," Flatfoot threw the words over his shoulder.

Cunningham picked up a bit of firewood.

"They're watched. You with the pail o' jam, climb out o' it. You've had enough, you swine. No need o' bein' greedy."

With his free hand he reached across and pulled the jam pail clear off the little man's head.

"Set 'em all down and examine feet," Flatfoot commanded, casting an eye on the biggest man's footgear.

"Nothing doing." Cunningham obeyed. "All of them have rubbers on, except this little jam trimmed runt, and he's sporting shoepacks."

"This one's clear, too," Flatfoot complained disgustedly.

The tie cutters stared stupidly up at him from the floor.

"One, two, three, four," Cunningham counted. "Wasn't there—I thought I saw another."

"Righto. That ain't news, it's history." Flatfoot jumped for the door. "Keep an eye on them jossers. I put the fifth one away. He come scuttlin' out of the door when you started the war. I'll go look him over. But watch them close and tap any that shows intelligent movements with that billet o' maple. We beat 'em proper two to five with surprize on our side, but this here's different, and 'cautious' is the word now we're detectives."

"I'll watch them." Cunningham waved his stick threateningly.

The two victims of the bench having recovered their wind a bit had been struggling feebly. Now they relaxed again. The little chap was digging thick, treachy jam out of eyes and ears. The big man sat stupidly on the stool.

"Disgusting," Cunningham shuddered. "You with the jam complexion, go over to that bucket and wash your dial. You fair sicken me—me that hates jam in each and every form. What you got there, Flatfoot?"

"Pork barrels is handy." Flatfoot returned to the room dragging the fifth man with him, a miserable little rat of a chap, with furtive eyes, who trembled in his big captor's grip.

"Number five. He come a-boltin' like I said," Flatfoot explained. "But I caught him on the run, and that there empty pork barrel bein' handy, I filed him for future reference. And he stuck. Oh yes, he stuck in that barrel, bein' jammed down hard. And now take a look at his tootsies and tell me what you see," he triumphed.

"Army shoes?" Cunningham hazarded.

"Righto." Flatfoot upended his prey.

The little man's toes touched the table under the hanging lantern. They beat a tattoo on the worn boards as he shook in Flatfoot's clutch.

"Look at 'em! Look at 'em! The heels," Flatfoot crowed. "L—l—l—" his voice dwindled.

The little man's heels shone in the light of the lantern; both of them. Army boots he sported sure enough. But a worn iron plate shone as brightly on the left heel as on the right.

For a moment silence brooded over the stricken field.

It was Cunningham, ex-jam-buyer, who found the grain of comfort.

"Anyway," said Cunningham, "anyway, he eats jam."

"Jam!" Flatfoot snorted. "What the —— do I care if he eats jam! Here we beat up innocent men—and you say he eats jam."

"No innocent man eats jam," Cunningham protested.

"I hate it," wailed the little rat of a man. "S'welp me, it makes me sick."

FLATFOOT upended him again. He had a hunch. He remembered how the little man had behaved when they entered.

"Oh, you do, do you?" he cried. "I've an idea you don't hate other things—say muskrat skins. Now, Mister Man-that-bolts-from-strangers, where'd you hide 'em?"

He shook the little rat of a man again. But he was stubborn. If guilty he wasn't admitting it—yet.

"You keep an eye on them others," Flatfoot admonished Cunningham.

"We ain't lookin' for trouble," growled the biggest of the tie cutters. "If you come lookin' for Dirty Trayne, why didn't you say so 'stead o' startin' murder. I allus knowed he was crooked, winnin' like he did at poker."

"Right you are, mate," the jam-infested victim of the night chorused from his task at the water bucket. "Hangin's too good for him."

"Watch them friendly enemies special close, just the same." Flatfoot eyed Cunningham thoughtfully a moment. "Now it looks kind o' providential," he said at last.

"What does?" Cunningham asked.

"Two jam haters in the one day," Flatfoot went on, thinking aloud. "You hates jam and fights when I offers it. This here crook that stole our muskrat skins—"

"I never stole nothing," the little man wailed. "I never saw no muskrat skins."

"You close that mouth. You'll have a chance to open it wide in a minute." Flatfoot dragged him across the room.

There was still corn in Egypt—still jam on the shelf. He lifted a pail of it down. In the middle of its sticky surface was a wooden paddle used in ladling it out. Flatfoot twisted the paddle around, then—

"Open wide, baby, momma's feedin' you a treat," he commanded.

With a shudder the little man obeyed.

"Oh, I say, old top," Cunningham protested. "Isn't that a bit too much?"

"You tend to business," Flatfoot growled. "Open again, you messy blighter, and swallow your tonic clean. I don't aim to waste none on them wagglin' ears of yours like I done with the first lot."

The little man gulped.

"I—won't," he groaned.

"Then where is them muskrat skins?" Flatfoot was firm. As Dirty Trayne protested his innocence again the paddle met his open lips, entered between them.

"There's an hour's feedin' ahead o' you, you strong silent man," he admonished, "unless you—"

He paused, for across the room Cunningham, shuddering and writhing, gave signs of active seasickness.

"Jam," he muttered, "jam!"

"There ain't no stewardess aboard tonight, so you act sensible," Flatfoot advised. "Now, Dick Turpin, where'd you bury the body?"

The little man opened his lips to protest anew. And again the paddle came into play.

"He's weakenin'," Flatfoot reported. "Hold out another minute Cunningham, and the ship is ours."

OLD BILL STEVENS watched them as they came up from the river, a weary cavalcade in the morning sun. In the lead was a big melancholy stranger. Behind him walked a little rat of a man with a sticky, corpse-white face. Last of all strutted Flatfoot Hawkins, the great detective.

The little man with the dirty face was carrying a bale, a square, well-packed bale. At the sight of it Bill Stevens started.

"He's delivered the goods, he has, the crazy bloke? Now what do you know about that?"

"Throw 'em there," Flatfoot Hawkins told the little man as they came up to the cabin door. "Fall out and rest, you wore-out Life o' Crime. Bill, meet my friend Cunningham, who can fight as rough as the best of them."

Cunningham shook hands limply.

"Stomach's not right," he complained, "and we hit the trail most all night."

"What the—? Where the—? Now see here, Flatfoot," Bill protested. "What you holdin' out on me for? Who's Dirty Face yonder, gaspin' by our bale o' muskrat?"

"He's a reformed character, is Dirty Face," Flatfoot explained, launching into a narrative—somewhat censored—of the night's activities.

"Now to begin with, this here bit o' scrap iron I'm showin' you is off an army boot, and, findin' it on the cabin floor when them pelts was stole, why, I puts two and two together and—well, the answer was sort of a command. 'Look for the man with the army boots,' says this bit of iron. So I looked."

Old Bill listened to his tale of battle, and all the time he chuckled quietly.

"He didn't talk free, he didn't," Flatfoot concluded, "but I argued the matter, I did. And after a bit he sort o' weakened—thanks to the jam. Had the bale under his bunk. Strolled over here and nobbled it easy as you please while we was at the upper shack. Figgered on takin' it out tomorrow. Come overland, he did, from his filthy camp. From which we reasoned he could find the best trail back. Oh, it was some pilgrim's progress we had, and it's a repentant bloke he is, now he's cast down his burden o' sin.

"And so, here's the josser and here's the fur, and, you bein' willing, it's free he is. —— strike me perishin' pink but he don't need no punishment from us," Flatfoot finished.

"Righto," Cunningham agreed. "Let the jasper go, Mr. Stevens. He's suffered, he has."

"Suits me," Bill grinned. "But I'd like to ask ye one question before this here swarree breaks up. You goes lookin' for an army boot without no iron heelpiece. Did ye find it, Flatfoot Hawkins?"

"I—I—" Flatfoot stammered.

"Course you didn't," Bill stepped into the cabin. His voice came to them as they waited. "If you'd asked me, I could ha' told ye where that hunk o' scrap iron came from, Flatfoot Hawkins." He came back carrying something behind him. "Mebbe you reckernize this here," he laughed, producing a worn army boot. "And if you look close at this old brogan o' yours, you'll find where that hunk o' iron come from—you and your army men."

"But— But—"

Flatfoot took the boot, stared down at the heel. Right enough. The metal reinforcement was gone.

"I picked her up two days ago. Figgered where she come from, and set her aside, meanin' to tell ye about it," Bill explained. "Now ain't Providence right wonderful? It makes me forgetful, plumb forgetful, but it does better with you, Flatfoot Hawkins. It makes you a dumb detective, as you might say, a perishin' dumb detective."

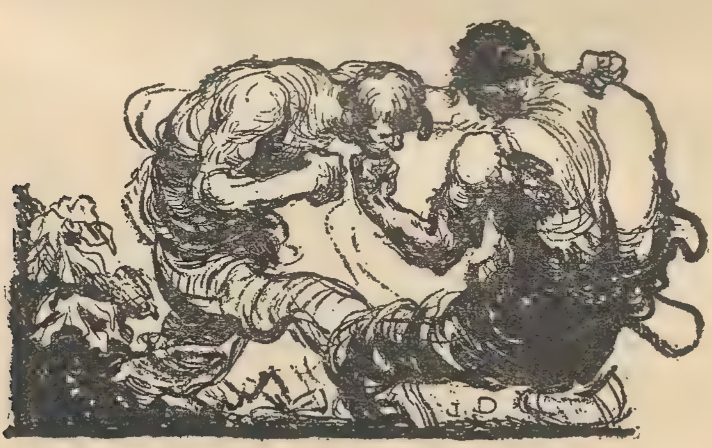
Flatfoot shook his head doubtfully. Then he looked down where Dirty Trayne cowered by the bale of muskrat pelts. There was the criminal, there were the stolen goods, and he had got them both. His shoulders went back, his eyes shone with pride—

"A perishin' successful detective," said Flatfoot Hawkins.

"And his hungry apprentice," put in Cunningham weakly.

"Hungry?" Bill Stevens was all solicitude. "Well, we was figgerin' on makin' the Stoppin' Place today on our way out, and there ain't no meat. How'd a bite of bush bread an jam suit ye?"

Two men groaned weakly.



The WIVES

by John V. A. Weaver

SO LUCY wants to marry this Marine—
"Wants" to? She's ravin', crazy wild about him;
Her face like it was new-made, twice as pretty;
And every time she says his name out loud
She makes "George" sound as if it was a song.
It's the real thing this time. And who should know it
As well as me?—And now I got to try
To tell her what I think she ought to do.
What can I say? How can I make her see?

He sure is one fine figure of a man,
So big and straight! And curly hair, and eyes
That's laughin' most the time; and that soft voice
That's just like strokin' you when he is talkin'.
Real gentle, he is. And yet, you know right off
He can turn in a wink to somethin' hard,
And quick, and terrible, that would be awful
To fight against. Somethin' that wouldn't never
Give in, no matter what he had to go through.

What a grand record he made in the war—
Wounded, and decorated, and things like that.
And re-enlisted right away, and stayed.
And everybody that knows him sayin' that he's
The best top-sergeant in the whole Marines.

But now, with his enlistment runnin' out,
He swears he's through the wanderin' life forever.

"Yes, ma'am," he says to me, "I sure love Lucy.
And what I want is for us to get married,
And have a little home right near your place,
And kids—Back there in nineteen-ten, after
My hitch in the calvary, I worked two years
In the best auto-repair shop in Los Angeles.
I got to be a cracker-jack, even if I
Say it as shouldn't. Now I got a roll

Saved up, and there's this friend of mine, Jack Beals,
That's crazy to have me buy in on his shop.
It's a grand business. Just the thing, you see?
I had enough of kickin' around the world.
You needn't to worry, ma'am. I'm settlin' down!"

Talkin' that way and thinkin' of Lucy, he grins
So pleasant-like and tender, I know he means it,
Every word of it—now. And I almost believe
He's always goin' to feel that way . . . almost . . .

What can I tell her? Would it do any good
To say what's in my soul, day in, day out?
How can I put it so she'll really get it?
Like this? "He's a real man, your George. The kind
That men respect, and women can't help lovin'.
Only—" And how can I say what that "only" means?

How many times I told her about her Pa?
Just such a laughin', happy-go-lucky way
He had; just so he come along one day;
One of the last that sailed the old windjammers;
Thirty, he was, with eighteen years of sailin'
In every sea on earth. And he was through
With rovin'—so he said—and so he took
My heart for keeps. Oh, yes, he "settled down."
He was a right good carpenter, and learnt
To be an expert, quick. And three whole years
It was just like a dream, in our little flat.
And Lucy come. And Jim was always laughin'
So happy, and his eyes laughed too. Oh, yes—

How can I make her look ahead and see
The way her George's laugh'll sort of fade
Till it ain't real no more? And then, one day,
She'll think he's lookin' straight into her eyes
Like always, and then all a sudden she'll feel
It isn't her he's seein', but some place
Thousands of miles away— And she'll be scared,
And ast him what's the matter. Then he'll grin,
And shake his head, and tell her that it's nothin'.

So she won't worry again for a few days.
And then she'll notice two or three times that week
While he is talkin', some name like "Singapore,"
Or "China" or "Haiti" will pop up where it don't
Make any sense. And the same look will come—

So then she'll work and fight to keep him happy,
And doll herself up fine, and take such pains!
It won't be any use. There'll be a silence
Growin' up like a wall, growin' and growin'
Until the minute comes when he can't stand it
A second more. And then it all comes out—

"I hear the surf a-roarin' on a beach
Five thousand miles from here"—those was Jim's words
That's cut into my mind like with a knife.
"The wind is singin' songs to me," he says.
"I got to smell the salt again. Oh, hell,
Sure, I'm a fool. This is so sweet and nice
Here in our flat, with you and the kid. But God!
I just can't help it. Oh, I've tried to fight
Against it, but the old life's just too strong!"
What good did it do me to beg and beg?

"It's just a little special trip," he says,
"Down in a schooner to South America,
Me bein' skipper for this queer old duck
That's doin' explorin' around some unknown islands.
It's good pay, see? And I got quite some dough
Saved up. It's yours. And don't you worry a bit,
I'll be back soon. But I just got to go—
Just for a change. This life is killin' me,
So slow, and regular, always the same—"

And so he went. And he come back, all right,
Inside a year, lookin' so gay and fine,
The way he used to. And he "settled down"
Again. And this time lasted six whole months,
Until he got another skipper's job
In coastwise shippin'. But that was too tame,

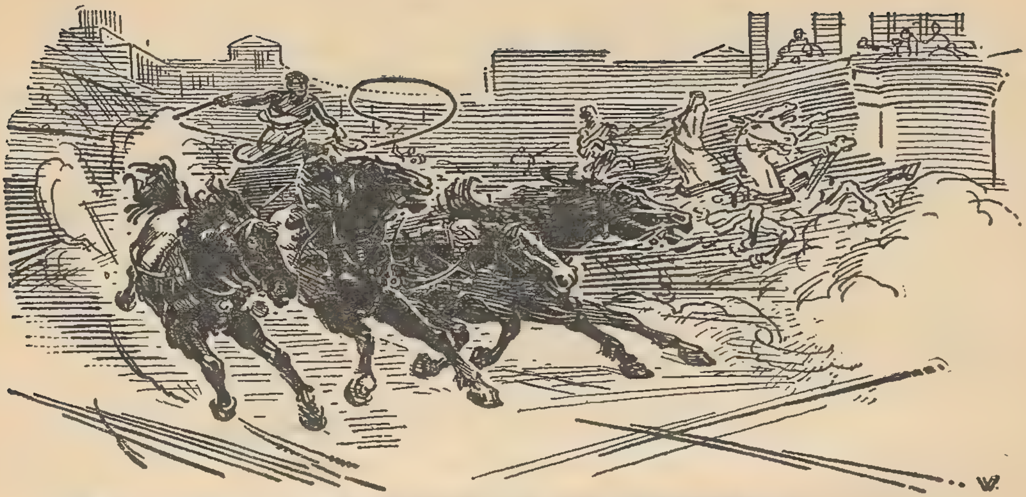
Of course. So then it wasn't but a year
Before he had to go with some crazy fools
That knew the place they was a buried treasure
Off somewhere in the Caribbean Sea—
Nobody ever heard of any of 'em
Ever again. And I went back to pa's,
And boarded with what was saved up in the bank,
And what I managed to scrape up with dress-makin'
Till Lucy got old enough to help, with a job
Typewritin'—

Oh, don't think it's him I blame!
I couldn't hold him, that's all. Women ain't
Ever enough to hold that kind of a man.
It only lasts so long. They's somethin' owns 'em,
Those men. It lends 'em to us for a while,
And then—it calls 'em, and they have to go.
A treasure-hunt, or South Sea Islands, or
Alaska. What's the use of namin' places?
Somewheres where things is happenin', that's it!
They wasn't meant to sit and fret at home,
They got to go and do!

And now, it's Lucy.
"Like mother and like daughter"—that's the way
I guess you'd say it. And it's in the blood
To love that kind. And yet, I got to save her.

Save her? Save her from what? I got no right!
Even if she has to pay with years of cryin',
And nights of layin' wonderin', and prayin',
It's worth it! Yes, it is! To have him love her—
One of the strongest, one of the bravest ones!
None of your pale-faced, creepin' stick-in-the-muds,
But a real man!

No, I ain't got the right
To say a word. It's her own life. She has
To take her chance. Why, since the world begun
They's always us, that have to stay behind,
And watch, and cry, and hope—God help us all!



THE MESSENGER OF DESTINY Conclusion

By Talbot Mundy

Author of "Tros of Somothrace," "The Enemy of Rome," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

"PEARLS," cried Zeuxis, "and evenly matched. Tros, whom do you want murdered?"

"When I must kill, then it is I who kill," Tros answered coldly. "I am here to save Britain from Cæsar. With these pearls will I buy you, Zeuxis. Tell me how to put a stick in Cæsar's wheel."

Zeuxis stirred uneasily, but his eyes lusted for the glowing jewels in Tros' palm.

"I prefer not to be crucified, but your pearls rob me of my judgment, O Tros. There is a way, however. There is a way to control Rome—through a woman."

"I will have no truck with women," bellowed Tros. "I play a man's game."

But the next morning Tros and Zeuxis traveled through the seething streets of Rome to a gaudily pretentious villa overlooking the Tiber. Here Helene of Alexandria, the most brilliant figure among the glittering courtesans of Rome, a slave-woman raised by the adulation of the young bloods and the staid men of influence alike to a position of tremendous power in the affairs of the municipium.

Some said this enchanting woman was a spy of Ptolemy; others that she was the secret tool of Cæsar. Tros was determined to know the truth, and knowing it, to make Helene an instrument for the salvation of his beloved homeland.

And when Helene saw Tros of Samothrace, she feared almost instinctively that he was a man who would be no easy prey to her infinite guile.

"You are Cæsar's slave," Tros challenged, "a slave masquerading as a free woman."

"I am free," insisted Helene fiercely.

"You are a slave—you were a dancing girl in the court of Ptolemy. In Rome the penalty for such deceit is death. Help me and I shall not betray you."

"Master of men, you are cruel!" cried Helene. And then, "Go to Cato. Tell him you are Helene's friend. It is enough."

The next day Tros faced fierce Cato.

"You carry tales against Cæsar?" asked Cato sarcastically.

"I have come to save Britain," answered Tros. "Cæsar is drunk with the hog-swill of flattery. If he prevails against Britain, think you that Cæsar's greed for power will be glutted? Nay, you know Cæsar better than that. He will then sweep down on Rome. Cæsar will not be satisfied till he has the whole world writhing under his heel."

Old Cato listened, but he was not swayed by logic. He believed naïvely enough that if need be Cæsar could be curbed by quoting laws. Therefore when Tros had left, he hurriedly had Helene of Alexandria arrested, for he knew that Tros had come in her personal litter and he feared that she had allied herself with Tros in some insidious scheme to betray Cæsar.

When Tros heard of the arrest, he became deeply concerned at the turn matters had taken, and feared for the safety of his Northmen who were secreted in Zeuxis' home. It was decided that Julius Nepos, chief instructor of the public gladiator's, might be able to offer some sound advice. So Tros visited the old warrior, who told him to lay his case before Pompey, who was due to arrive in the city that night. Meeting Pompey's cortège as it entered the Forum, Tros made himself known to the great leader, who promised him an interview at the Temple of Vesta.

Tros donned his gorgeous oriental cloak, and taking Orwic with him, he made his way to the temple. Fortune favored him, for as he approached, he noticed that the watch of the sacred fires was being changed, and that the Virgo Vestalis Maxima, head of the Vestal Virgins, was passing with her solemn retinue. Gathering up every iota of courage, Tros made bold enough to address her. Once more fortune smiled on him, and the woman who through the symbol her chastity could sway the degenerate Roman mobs with a frown, who had even the mighty Cæsar at her command, gave him audience.

"Why does Cæsar say he goes to Britain?" Tros asked the Vestal.

"He has told all Rome that he will bring back pearls for a breastplate for the Venus Genetrix."

Tros drew forth from under his cloak a heavy leather bag tied with gold wire.

"These pearls," he said, "are superior to those that Pompey brought from Asia and put on exhibition in the temple. These were given me by those who ponder over Britain's destiny. *Virgo beatissima*, I crave leave to deposit them in your charge, as a trust for Cæsar's use, to be known as his gift."

"I can not acknowledge you—except to Cæsar," said the Vestal.

"I have a swift ship. Send me to Cæsar. If you think he can save Rome from anarchy, send me to save him from invading Britain, where he will squander his strength and wreak a havoc, while Rome dies, mad and masterless."

"Then," said the Vestal, "bid Cæsar look to Rome. Bid him keep his hand on Gaul, that when the hour strikes, he may leave Gaul tranquil at his back." This was uttered in a tone of dismissal, but Tros had one more favor to ask.

"There is a woman in the clutches of the prætor's men whom Cæsar employs to ferret out information—Helene of Alexandria—"

"That immodest slut!"

"Is Cæsar immaculate?"

"Cæsar is pontifex maximus."

And with a logic that could not be denied Tros finally succeeded in winning the Vestal over on this point also.

"You overstep your privilege," she said, "but I shall mention her to Pompey."

And when Tros and Orwic stepped out on the sacred portico, the whole conference seemed to Tros to have been some fantastic reverie, and the lictor on guard called out arrogantly:

"Move on. This is no place for loiterers."

Not long afterward Tros learned of Zeuxis' treachery. The wily Greek had betrayed his warriors into the hands of the prætor. He learned, too, that Helene was incarcerated in the prætor's dungeons. Tros, with the aid of bluster and tall talk, beguiled the keeper into granting him audience with Helene. Tros spoke curtly:

"You shall be released. Zeuxis has betrayed both of us. Watch him and make use of him. I shall stand by you."

And Helene, with the conceit of all beautiful women, felt that something stronger than duty was motivating the handsome Samothracian.

Pompey had offered up gifts at the shrine of the Vestals, and from the eternal fires had sought some augury of the fate of his wife, Julia. He was not in the best of humor when Tros forced his way into his presence a second time. Pompey curled his lip and said scornfully:

"Mercury! You reach your goal. The Vestals tell me to give no offense to Tros of Samothrace. What means your meddling? What, pray, seek you in Rome?"

"Triumvir," said Tros, "I turn my back on Rome the instant you return my men to me."

"It was not of your men you wished to speak when you accosted me at the bridge last night."

"Not now. I demand my men."

"Then," said Pompey, "I have no more to say." He turned on his heel and mounted his horse.

That night Tros' attitude was as brave as ever, but his heart was sad. He took mental inventory of his position and of the various protagonists who had brought about this dilemma. Orwic watched him with deep concern. Then he said:

"Run for it. You must leave your men in Pompey's hands and hurry to Ostia."

"I will die first," said Tros. "They would die for me. Shall I do less for them?"

That night Porsenna the Etruscan, his money-bag weightier by a handful of Tros' silver, led Tros and Orwic into the valley below the Palatinate to an enormous wooden structure from whose gaudily postered walls rose a pandemonium of wild animals and condemned men. This was the great Roman arena that fed the fervid blood-lust of the lost citizenry of a crumbling world-city.

Nepos, the keeper of the gladiators, did not attempt to deceive the two Samothracians.

"Your men are here. They will make good gladiators. Come, you may see them."

When the Northmen saw Tros they wept and begged him to save them. Tros rebuked them sternly. They had allowed themselves to be intrigued by a lying Greek. He, Tros, must buy them back like a job-lot of slaves. They cried like old women— The Northmen heard and were shamed to silence. Then Tros addressed Nepos.

"Good friend, is there no law to release my men?"

Nepos admired the tall warrior. He said:

"If I can save your men, I will. They are badly needed for the games a week hence. There is a shortage of barbarians to make a showing against the black spearmen of the King of Numidia. They tell me your men fight with axes. The populace would adore that."

By this time Helene had been released, and Tros, in conference with her, conceived of the wildest plan a desperate man ever invented. Helene was entering a team of Cappadocian horses under Pompey's name. Orwic, whose prowess as a charioteer was well known to Tros, should drive Helene's team in the *quadriga* race on the third day of the games. He *must* be the victor. And Orwic must win the betting money for that madding throng, as well as foretell Cæsar's coming triumph. Then, the races over, Orwic should join Tros in the *carceres* and sally forth into the arena while the crowd still loved him, thus making Tros and his Northmen popular. Whether they fought the wild beasts or the Numidians, Orwic should act as leader, and when the unknown foe was beaten—as they must be—Tros, acting as interpreter for Orwic, should appeal to the spectators—to the Vestals—to Pompey himself, as patron of the games. The odds were half a million to one against the success of the plan, but there was no other—

Once having been betrayed by Zeuxis, Tros was wary lest the beautiful courtesan treat him likewise. But she reassured him.

"I am yours," she answered. "I will serve you. But remember—I am yours as much as any of your men and you shall not desert me!"

CHAPTER XIII

CONOPS

IN CELLARS, dens and storerooms under the tiers of wooden seats, in the dungeons, and in the big, stone-walled inclosures at either end of the Circus Maximus pandemonium reigned for many days before a public spectacle. In nothing had the Romans carried organization to such a pitch as in the management of public games, so discipline prevailed in spite of frantic haste and privileged interference. The actual control was in the hands of experts, many of whom were foreigners, and each of whom knew the last detail of his own particular responsibility.

The giver of the games—he who paid the bill—was only nominally in authority; he left all details to subordinates, of whom the greater number were, like Nepos, permanently employed by the city and responsible to elected officials. They resented the officious interference of the patron's own men, whose ambition naturally was to produce a spectacle more magnificent and thrilling than any that had preceded it, the whole purpose of the spectacle—originally a religious rite—being to increase the patron's fame.

Pompey lacked—and his lieutenants knew he lacked—a true grip on the popular imagination. His tastes were literary and artistic. He loathed the brutal exhibitions that had become the crowd's first test of a man's fitness to hold public office. Although his agents scoured the earth for animals and gladiators, though his school of gladiators was the best in Rome, and though his racing-stable was superbly managed; beyond ordering his treasurer to pay the bills he gave scant personal attention to any of those interests, preferring his country estate and his library, both lavishly adorned with plunder that he brought home from his conquests in the East.

Pompey was a man whose natural ability was undermined by vanity and by contempt for details. It pleased him to believe that, in his own phrase, he could stamp his foot and raise an army—to accomplish any purpose. Temperamentally he was lazy, vain and opportunist; politically he was autocratic but averse to civil violence except in so far as it was necessary to enforce his own convenience; his own lieutenants were as arrogant and violent as any men in Rome, and he upheld them. Theoretically he was opposed to looting, but he had enriched himself by that means; in speech and writing he condemned corruption, but his own front garden at election time was set with tables, at which his corps of secretaries handed out the money for the votes. His magnanimity was frequently spectacular and very often genuine, particularly if it ministered to pride; but he could shut his eyes to things he did not want to know, with almost ox-like indifference—in which respect he was so far inferior to Cæsar that there was no comparing the two, politically. Cæsar ignored nothing. Pompey, equally an opportunist, blazed out of retirement, exercised his genius until he wearied of it, and withdrew again.

Naturally, his character had bred a corresponding attitude of mind in his lieutenants, who irritated Cæsar at every opportunity and looked to Pompey to control the consequences. It was well known, even to outsiders, that the only bond of peace between the two men was the fact that Cæsar's daughter Julia was Pompey's wife and that Pompey was extremely fond of her. Cæsar depended on Julia to preserve at least the outward appearance of friendship, although it was a moot question whether she deliberately fed Cæsar's ambition or was simply eager to contrive peace.

Now, although the doctors held out hopes of Julia's recovery, they only deceived Pompey who, as usual, believed what it pleased him to believe and shut his eyes to an alternative. None who had seen her recently had any doubt that Julia was dying; and none doubted that when Julia was dead the open breach with Cæsar must inevitably follow. Pompey's closest friends, in fact, were eager for the issue; it was clear to them that Cæsar's influence was gaining and delay increased his chances of success. The time to split the breach wide open was while Cæsar's hands were full in Gaul and Britain.

So the men who took over the Circus Maximus in Pompey's interest determined that the crowd should recognize him as the greatest entertainer who had ever squandered his munificence on Rome. They would make Cæsar's entertainments, recklessly extravagant though these were, fade from the public memory. They nearly drove the staff of regular attendants mad with their interference and Nepos, for instance, cursed the very name of Pompey. The dens and cages under the high tiers of seats, and the cellars below those, were so packed with roaring animals, and the stench from them was so atrocious, that it was even doubted whether horses would be manageable during the three days chariot-racing that were to precede the slaughter.

THE dungeons were so thronged that no excuse was needed for confining Tros and his men in wooden cells above the level of the ground. Nepos even used the Northmen to help spread the loads of coarse sand brought in by countless cars from the sand-pits near the Via Appia and many another prisoner toiled in fetters, hoping that good will might cause him to be spared some last indignity. The risk of fire was so great that the whole of Crassus' fire-brigade and all the sailormen ashore in Ostia were summoned to stand watch, with the result that two whole crowded streets of Rome were gutted by the fires which raged with no one to extinguish them. All Rome talked of nothing but the coming games.

Nepos, who never went home now but spent day and night attending to his prisoners and rearranging groups for this and that atrocious butchery, made quite a confidant of Tros, invited him to share his hurried meals and grumbled to him about every countermanded order and new interference with his plans.

"Why can't they leave it to men who have done this kind of thing all their lives? Take you and your men, for instance. First, I was to send you in to fight Numidians—two droves of you, one either side of the *spina,* and yourself alone against the Numidians' leader, straight in front of Pompey's box. That would have been good; but, some fool thought it would be better to make one group of you and send you against Roman gladiators, who would finish you off and then slaughter the blacks—which would have been a sort of compliment to the ever-victorious Roman legions.

"Well, that wouldn't have been so bad, although it would have cost like Cannæ in expensive gladiators. But some other idiot remembered that you're criminals and not entitled to a fair chance. One man said I shouldn't give you weapons. I had Hercules' own labor to convince that stupid fool—he's one of Pompey's favorites and probably the man who agreed with Zeuxis to put you in trouble for sake of your pearls —and by the way, I haven't searched you for those pearls, although they ordered me to do it."

"I have fifty, and a little money," Tros said, looking keenly at him.

"Well, I haven't seen! If you get out of this you will need all—but I don't believe that's possible. If it's a case of masks and hooks that cloak of yours shall hang on my wall. I will keep an eye on the men who drag you to the *spoliarium.* That fool argued that you and your men are criminals and should be torn by beasts; he wanted you used on the bulls that Cæsar sent here recently. But luckily for you Cæsar's agents wouldn't let us have the bulls; Cæsar expects to use them for his own show later on. I insisted you're not regular criminals, not having been committed by a judge, and somebody might hold me liable if I should send you in unable to protect yourselves. Then they thought of a new notion—not a bad one either. You're to have the weapons you're used to and fight lions; then Numidians; then, if you survive that, Roman gladiators. And now listen; I'm an old hand at this business.

"The longer you last the better the crowd will like you, unless they suspect you of stalling. On the other hand, you'll have to use caution. If you're too cautious the overseers will order out the whips and hot irons to inspire you. You must take a very careful middle course. If you overcome the Numidians too easily the populace will lust to see the tables turned on you and you'll get no mercy when the gladiators lay you on the sand. But if you lose a few men to the lions, and some more to the Numidians, and then fight well against the gladiators, they'll take pity on you from the benches. What do you say? Shall I promise a few pearls to Glaucus—he fights with the sword and buckler and has never been touched once—he's in his prime—unbeatable. For half a dozen pearls he would run you through the thigh. And Glaucus is a decent fellow—good-natured—gallant—knows how to throw an attitude, and smile, with his foot on a man's body, that persuades the crowd to spare his victim nearly every time."

Tros nodded.

"Mind you, I can't guarantee the populace," said Nepos. "But if your man, Orwic, wins his race, and joins you, and plays leader against beasts and men; and if you fight capably, I think they will wave their handkerchiefs. If the applause is loud enough the Vestals are almost sure to add their verdict, and whether they order you released or not I can pretend I understood that. I should say you have a fifty to one chance, which is more than most men have who go in under my auspices!"

Tros thanked him.

"Don't offer me money!" said Nepos. "I'm old and don't need it. I'm devoted to justice, like Cato. I like to see the enemies of Rome die, but I prefer to give an honest man a chance. And by the way, remember about lions. They'll be half-starved, two to every one of you, and each will get a touch of hot iron as he comes out of the trap. Nine men out of ten get killed by striking at them too soon. Coax them, if you can, to spring. Then duck—don't jump aside—and rip them up from under. The worst are those that don't spring but lurk and then come running at you. Then what you chiefly need is luck, but the best plan is to run at them—meet them mid-way; sometimes then they flinch. Flinching costs life, man or beast! And mark you—never try to avoid them! Meet them head on. They can claw you sidewise quicker than a knife-stab."

TROS went to instruct his men and met less trouble than he feared. It thrilled the Northmen that their leader had preferred to share their fate, though they had walked into a trap like fools. Their own tradition, that a death in battle was a passport to the halls of everlasting revelry, was no half-hearted superstition; they regarded life as an exodium to death. They would have gloomed if left alone; with Tros to lead them they were jubiliant.

Tros borrowed a harp and set the *skald* to singing legends of Valhalla, until the Northmen roared the old familiar refrains and even the homesick Britons joined in, experts at a tune, although the vowel sounds they made instead of words were meaningless. So Nepos sent them wine, because their chanting cheered the other prisoners and it was half his battle to get men into the arena looking like men and not carcases already three parts dead. The hot iron and the whip could work a semblance of rebellious indifference, but song, so rarely heard within those walls, made men again of tortured riff-raff, who were lucky—as Nepos tactfully assured them—not to have been crucified at crossroads with their entrails showing through the wounds made by the scourge.

There was wine for all the prisoners the last three nights, because Tros persuaded Nepos to permit it and himself defrayed the cost, but the effect of that was largely offset by precautions against suicide; men fettered hand and foot and watched by slaves with heated irons are not easily encouraged. There were cries from a few caught opening a vein against a fetter's roughed edge or attempting to strangle each other. They were whipped for it, burned, and then lashed to the pillars to keep them from trying again. The roaring of the beasts—beginning to be starved now—made night horrible, and there had been a grim rehearsal in the afternoon that left its impress on the prisoners' minds. The picture was ineradicable—of the empty seats, where presently free Romans and their wives and daughters would lean gasping, lips parted, to gloat at the carnage.

Nine elephants, tortured to make them dangerous, were trumpeting their indignation. Wolves, that were to tear their next meal from the throats of unarmed men, howled in melancholy chorus. Bulls bellowed; and a great rhinoceros—a rarity Rabirius had begged from Ptolemy the Piper—pounded his cage with a noise like a splintering ship. One whole cage full of leopards got loose in the night and wrought havoc before they were cornered with torches and netted. The torches set fire to the planks of the seats overhead, and when that was extinguished the carpenters came to rebuild, so that morning might find the arena undamaged—new-painted—agleam in the sun.

It was under the din of the hammers, through the mingled stink and clamor of the beasts, that Tros heard a voice he thought he recognized. At first he mocked himself, believing he was dreaming. There were no lights, saving where the braziers glowed and where a guard or two moved phantom-like in gloom, occasionally pausing to insert a lamp between the bars and make sure that no prisoner should cheat the appetite of Rome by smothering himself. A shadow seemed to move within the shadow that lay slanting at the bars of Tros' cage—Nepos had assigned him to the cage-of-honor, reserved for women as a rule, where a breath of air could enter through the bars whenever any one passed through the wooden door into the unroofed arena. But Tros thought he had imagined that. He even looked away, not liking that imagination should deceive him; it suggested that the horror of the situation had begun to undermine his self-control.

But the voice spoke louder:

"Master! This is Conops! I am come from Ostia! I have three boats below the fish-wharf on the Tiber! Sigurdsen picked up a breeze off Corsica and now stands off and on before the harbor-mouth, where two great triremes lie at anchor."

"How is it I had no word from you before this?" Tros demanded sternly.

"Master, when I got to Ostia I knew that was no place for me! There were women and wine—no sight of Sigurdsen—I couldn't have resisted. So I stole a sail-boat and took with me a one-eyed slave, who called me brother. He wanted to escape to Corsica, where there are outlaws in the mountains, so he helped me to steal provisions from the stores behind the sheds where the imported slaves are quarantined. and we put to sea by night. I knew Sigurdsen would keep clear of the coast of Italy for fear of triremes. And I knew the pilot was a duffer who would want to sight land frequently. There was also food and water to consider; Sigurdsen would have to make some port of call before he dared put into Ostia with the chance of being chased away before he could reprovision; and besides, he would know you might want to put to sea at once, so he would fill the corn-bins and the water-butts at least. I picked him up the fourth day—saw his purple sails against the skyline.

"There was not much mutiny aboard. Such as it was soon quieted when I climbed over the rail. I gave them news of you. I said the Roman senate had proclaimed you admiral! But master, master, what is this! What—"

"Swiftly with your tale!" Tros ordered.

"I RETURNED with the ship, and when we sighted Ostia we had to put that Roman pilot in the fore-peak. He was up to mischief, trying to lay us on a sandbank where the trireme men could come and pick us clean in the name of salvage. We had brought along Bagoas, the slave. We shaved his head and I rubbed some stain on him, but he understood that the disguise wouldn't help him if he didn't act right. He was so afraid of being recognized and flogged to death for escaping that I had hard work to get him ashore.

"I was for hurrying to Rome. But the first Roman I met after I reached shore stopped me and asked whether I was Conops. I couldn't even talk Greek, naturally. I was from the western coast of Gaul and none too handy with any kind of speech, but quick-footed; and it was dark, so that was the last I saw of him. It seemed proper then to peel an eye before I cast off, so I sent Bagoas to a wine-shop to discover what was being said—you know the wine-shop near the rope-walk, where the big fat Jewess sells charms against scurvy and all the freed men go to learn the shipping news? I didn't give Bagoas enough money to get drunk, and pretty soon he overheard a loud-mouthed man who was looking for two lost gladiators. He was from Rome that hour. I had the news of you as soon as One-Eye had swallowed his *quartarius*.

"One-Eye wanted to be rid of me then, so I warned him I'd sell him to informers if he didn't stand by, and I promised him a billet on the ship if he behaved himself. He was a stoker in the baths before he ran, so anything looked good to him. I sent him back to Sigurdsen that same night with orders to send our longboat and a dozen Northmen with a week's provisions. They were to row straight up-Tiber—there's no tide worth mentioning, and the stream isn't too swift, not for one of our boat's crews. They were to wait for me where the barges lie anchored below the brick-kilns on the south side of the river. Then I hired two more boats—good ones—money down; and there was big fish, tons of it, all waiting to be boated up to Rome as soon as ever the slave-gangs came down stream. But something had delayed the slave-gangs and the fish was liable to rot, so I made a bargain to boat that fish to Rome at half price, they to load it and the merchant to give me a pass in writing in the name of Nicephorus of Crete. That made me right with any one who might ask questions. Then I ran up-river to the brick-kilns and fetched the Northmen; and what between rowing and towing, and they not knowing any human language so they couldn't answer questions, we made Rome all right; and the man who paid me for delivering the fish agreed to give me a cargo of empty oil-jars if I'd cut the price and wait a week.

"I stipulated he should give my men a shed to sleep in, down there by the Tiber, and what with hinting I might do a bit of smuggling for him, and my not seeming to know the price of freightage on the Tiber, we struck up quite a friendship and the crew are as safe as weevils in a loaf of bread. They're supposed to be Belgae, taken captive by Cæsar and sold in Gaul. I told him I'd left the papers for them with a Roman in Ostia who lent me money on that security; so he won't try any tricks; they'll be there when we want them.

"Then I went to Zeuxis' house, and found Helene talking with him. Something's up. They're hatching something. But she said where you are, so I brought Bagoas and came here to apply for a job to rig the awnings over the spectators' seats. That let me into the arena and the rest was easy. One of the guards here thinks I'm a slave belonging to the blacksmith who was fetched in in a hurry to repair the hinges on the dungeon gate—the one that opens into the arena. That's his sledge you hear.

"But now, master, what next? I'm only a seafaring man, and I've probably overlooked a lot of things, but you just say the word and I'll do my best for you, by Heracles. I've left Bagoas out in the arena, where he's chewing onions and waiting for the dawn to go on rigging. We can easily escape into the street. What then? I'm at the rope's end. There are three boats waiting, and a good crew. We can row downstream like Hermes-in-a-hurry—but how get you out of here?"

Tros reached an arm between the bars and gripped his shoulder.

"Little man," he said; and then, for a few heart-beats there was nothing he could say at all.

"Go you back to Sigurdsen," he ordered. "Bid him stand by in the offing five more days. Then, if I come not, divide the ship between you—he to be captain, you lieutenant, sharing profits equally. But I believe that I will come before the five days. Go you back to Sigurdsen and take Bagoas."

"Nay, I will not!" Conops answered. "I will stay here. You have been my master since I taught you how to splice a rope-end and—"

"YOU shall obey me!" Tros retorted. "Go you and tell Sigurdsen I come in five days. Say nothing more to him—unless I come not—only bid him watch those triremes in the port of Ostia and show them his heels if they put to sea. But on the fourth day, or the fifth day after you reach Sigurdsen, if you should see our three boats putting out, stand in them with all three oar-banks manned and all sail ready to be shaken down. Stand by to pluck us out from right under the triremes' noses if you must."

"But, master—"

"Mutiny? In this pass? You are the man I have always trusted, Conops. Do as I bid you!"

"Master, if we never meet again—"

"By Heracles, if I could get out I would break your head for such dog's whimpering! Obey! Step lively! Shall the gods come to the aid of men who drown good bravery with tears like pork in brine? Of what use is a sentimental lingerer by cell-doors? Do you think this is a brothel, that you dawdle in it? Off with you! Almighty Zeus! Have I neglected discipline, that my own man should flout me and defy me when I bid him—"

"Nay, not Neptune would defy you in that mood, master. Farewell!"

"Farewell, Conops. And expect me on the fifth day after you reach Sigurdsen—or sooner! Keep two good men at the masthead. Grease all blocks and reeve new running gear wherever needed. Serve out grease to all the rowers and don't let them waste it on the oar-ports; watch them rub it on the leathers. If I find one speck of dirt above-deck or below there will be Zeus' own reckoning to pay!"

CHAPTER XIV

CIRCUS MAXIMUS

AS THE fungus grows on dung-hills and the burned stump sends up shoots before it dies, life took a three day lease of hopeless men, and there were strange events within the dungeons while the chariot racing lasted. No stone walls could shut out the blare of the trumpets, the thunder of wheels and hoofs and the roar of the throng.

Not a criminal down the dark but knew the names of all the charioteers, and there was actually betting between cell and cell, men wagering their miserable pittances of bread, the doles of water or the questionable privilege of being last through the gate when the time came to face the arena. Last men usually got a taste of red-hot iron.

Dungeon-keepers, thronging at the gate to watch the racing, had to take turns hurrying below to name the winner of each *missus*, as a seven-round race was called; and there were twenty on the first day, twenty on the second. If a dungeon-keeper carried the news tardily there was a clamor that set Nepos in a frenzy for his reputation; and it generally sent him to Tros in the end because he had formed a strange attachment to him and it calmed the old man's overwrought nerves to talk frankly. His sinews stood like taut cords from the mental tension he was under.

"I grow old, Tros, but I never lose the fascination of these last hours. I have seen so many die that you would think I should feel indifferent. I tell you, curiosity grips me harder now than when I first had charge of the slaves who lop the heads off prisoners of war after a triumph. When I trained the gladiators, it was always the same fascination—where do they go when they die? What do they think when their heads are cut off? Why is it that excitement seizes them when the time draws near? Races—that is only an excuse. If there were silence out there on the sand, they would find some other reason to act foolishly. Tros, I have seen men who had been tortured until hardly any flesh remained on arms and legs, laugh gaily on the last night—men so racked that they had to be carried in and staked in the arena for the beasts to maul. Why? What is it that so takes hold of them and makes them reckless of whip or anything?"

"So many men, so many points of view," said Tros.

"Aye, maybe. But one death for all of them, whatever caused it! You are probably about to die. What thoughts are calming you so that you sit and clean your belt, whereas I fret myself? Ho! Brutus! Take an iron down there and use it freely unless they stop that clamoring— The races, Tros, excite me not at all and I can watch men being tortured—aye, and women, without even curiosity. But when it comes to death I must confess that interests me. Tell me, of what are you thinking?"

"Of the destiny that governs us," Tros answered. "I have seen death, too, and I have not yet met the man who must not die. But I believe it is impossible to kill a man until his time comes. And I think that if the gods have use for any one they pluck him out of any danger. But they have no use for men who pray to them and waste good time and energy on whining. I am waiting for the gods to show me half an opportunity."

"But I was talking about death," objected Nepos. "In the next three days eight hundred men, including gladiators, are to die where now the chariots are racing. What think you of death?"

"It is like tomorrow. I will face it when it comes," Tros answered. "In the meantime I would like to meet the miscreant who made this belt. He fashioned it too narrow and forgot that sea-air calls for double tanning of the leather. I would let him feel the belt a time or two and learn his trade; some never learn until it dawns on them that being flogged hurts!"

"Have you no fear?" Nepos asked. "I have seen men so in the grip of fear that they could not feel."

"I am familiar with fear," Tros answered. "It has also grown familiar with me and has abandoned many of its tricks as useless. Now I am afraid of one thing only—that the Britons may believe I have deserted them. There is a king in Britain, and a woman by the name of Fflur, his wife, who love me, and I love them. It would be a miserable destiny to die and leave them thinking I had never even run a risk to protect them from Cæsar."

"But if you went free, could you do that? How?" asked Nepos.

Tros' leonine eyes observed him for a moment. He was instantly alert for signals that the gods might give.

"If I should swear to you that I am telling naked truth, would you believe me and not ask questions?" he demanded.

Nepos nodded.

"I have heard strange truth from many a man in this place under a seal of secrecy. No law obliges me to tell what I learn here. Whoever comes into the *carceres*, the law has done with; he is a dead man and his secrets die too. But if you will speak of the Vestal Virgins I will not listen, because—"

"I will not speak of them," said Tros. "But I will say this—if the gods, or you, or any one can get me out of here alive—and I will not go, mind you, without the men who call me master!—I can call off Cæsar."

"How?"

"By turning him toward Rome! That is naked truth, on my oath by the shrines of Samothrace."

"You have a message for him from—you mean, that if you reach him—"

"He will take his eyes off Britain and make Rome his goal. He will believe the time has come to try out destiny!" said Tros.

THE Roman throng in the arena roared like mad beasts—shrieked, yelled, clamored—as a four-horse chariot went down under another's wheels. The tumult swallowed up the roaring of the beasts and there were warning trumpet blasts to stop stamping that might wreck the rows of seats. Expectancy silenced the dungeons, until suddenly they burst into a tumult because nobody reported what had caused the uproar. At a nod from Nepos half a dozen men went into the arena, armed with hooks and ropes, to drag away dead horses and a mangled man.

"Their first taste of blood!" said Nepos. "This time tomorrow you will hear them offering money to the charioteers to smash their opponents' wheels! There's little chance for any novice such as your man."

"So?" said Tros.

"No chance at all. They'll roll him in the sand before he goes around the *spina* once. However, I have always thought Pompeius Magnus was a danger to Rome. He has none of the true bronze in him that Cæsar has. Cæsar can be cruel; he has virtue; he is not afraid of anything and he isn't lazy. Cato is wrong about Cæsar, as I have told him half a hundred times. And so you think the gods make use of you and me? I doubt it. That is not a Roman way of thinking of the gods. However, each to his own theory—and death to us all in the end! Well, Tros, keep up your courage. I would like to see Julius Cæsar come to discipline this city! And if—Pompey accused you of intriguing with—Who should know better than They what will happen? Well, keep up your courage. It's against the rules for any one to beg their favor or to hand them a petition, and it's death, mind you, to insult them, but listen now! There's no law against, for instance,—"

Nepos hesitated. He was actually trembling. Vestal Virgins were a power so intensely reverenced that even in the *carceres* their name was sacrosanct. Not only were they unapproachable, but all the reverence of Rome for her traditions and her old grim gods had centered—rallied, as it were—around the persons of the Vestals. They alone were without blemish and without reproach.

"And Pompey dares to put a spite on them!" said Nepos. "If they know you are in here, he very likely dares them to protect you! Probably they don't know. Probably they will know for the first time when they see you march out of the dungeon gate. Well—there is no law against my changing the arrangements. Listen—when I send you in to face the lions, march you straight to Pompey's box and there salute him. That is something only gladiators are supposed to do. Then turn toward the Vestals in the box beside him on his right hand and salute them. The attendants are supposed to loose the lions instantly when you appear but I will bid them wait while you march once around the arena and let the populace observe how gallantly you bear yourselves. When you have slain the lions, make no appeal but await the Numidians close to the Vestals' box. And the same when the Numidians are beaten and the gladiators come. Then, if the Vestals choose to spare you, they will have the verdict of the populace and Pompey himself will have to bow to it."

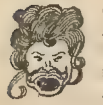
Within the dungeon recklessness increased as time wore on. The night after the second day of racing a rebellion broke out and nearly ended in escape. A score of men pounced on the guard who entered their dark hole to feed them, robbed him of his hooked club, slew him, seized the hot irons from the braziers and stormed the stairway leading to the upper cells. Extra guards were summoned from the outside and for an hour there was infernal war by torchlight until all the men who had escaped were roped and four guards, suffering from ghastly wounds inflicted by a hooked club, had been carried out. All the while the fighting lasted Nepos' voice kept threatening drastic penalties to any guard who "spoiled" a man, as he expressed it; they were needed whole for the arena, able to stand up and die excitingly, so it was the guards, that night, who suffered.

"Nevertheless," said Nepos, "they shall wish they had refrained from that attempt. That batch was destined for the elephants, who slay swiftly. Now they shall be torn by dogs, and they shall enter the arena first."

His honor was offended by the outbreak and he even put an extra chain and lock on Tros' cell door.

"Not that I doubt your good will, but a madness seizes men at times and they act like leopards," he explained. "I have known prisoners to break the bars and kill the other prisoners who would not join them."

But he let Tros out of his cell next day to watch the racing through a small hole in the dungeon wall. He fettered his wrists behind his back and chained him to a ringbolt in the stone floor, as he explained it, to prevent the guards from telling tales about him; but the truth was, Nepos was himself half mad with nervousness, as fascinated by the prospect of the butchery to come as were the citizens who packed the seats in the arena.



THEY were yelling now for blood. It did not satisfy them that the charioteers showed almost superhuman skill in swinging four-horse teams around the curves at each end of the course; they urged the men to break each other's wheels, to cut in and break horses' legs, to beat each other with their whips. They howled and whistled when a man won easily. And when the next teams lined up for the start, instead of waiting breathless for the starter to give the signal from his box they yelled advice to the contestants to play foul and hurled abuse to the officials whose duty it was to compel the charioteers to line up properly along the oblique starting-line which was arranged to compensate the outside chariot for the wider circle it must make at the farther end.

The *spina* down the centre, adorned with flag-poles and dolphins, was as crowded with spectators as were the surrounding tiers of seats. The mob roared loudest when a group who leaned over the *spina*, clinging to one another, fell and were crushed under chariot-wheels; their bodies tripped a four-horse team and the resulting crashing carnage produced roars of satisfaction that aroused the lions and indignant elephants—so that it was impossible to get the horses started for the next race until attendants seized their heads and some of them were kicked and crushed under the wheels.

It was mid-afternoon before Orwic's turn came, and the din that greeted him from the upper seats was evidence enough that Zeuxis and Helene had neglected nothing that could stir the popular imagination. He was dressed like any other charioteer, in Roman tunic, with a red badge to distinguish him, and came out first of four teams through the archway, in a chariot bearing Pompey's monogram. That meant that he had drawn the inside berth, and the betting odds changed in his favor rapidly, as the mob's voice indicated, breaking into short staccato barks.

There was a breathless silence as the four teams moved up to the line, each charioteer reining and urging his horses to get them on their toes—then suddenly an uproar like a vast explosion as the chariot next to Orwic's swerved in to lock wheels and pin him up against the *spina*— a trick often played on novices to spoil their chance before the race began. But the uproar broke into a tumult of astonished laughter at the neatness with which the unknown man shot clear of the entanglement and, wheeling, struck the offending veteran across the face. The crowd applauded him until the frantic horses nearly broke out of control, and the more they plunged and fought the men who tried to hold their heads, the more the spectators thundered, stamping their feet until attendants armed with staves belabored them to save the wooden floors.

Then laughter; for the race was a procession of three chariots pursuing Orwic's, weaving in and out, maneuvering to wreck each other at the turns, but never coming within lengths of the bay team driven by the Briton, who could hug the corners with his horses belly-to-the-earth because he had been taught from infancy to do the same thing with scythe-armed chariots on either hand. The unknown man was in his element. In contrast to the furious histrionics of the others he was quiet, almost motionless. Excepting at the corners, which he took on one wheel like a sail-boat in a squall, he stood erect, his only gesture a salute to Pompey's box and to the Vestals as he whirled by.

Men threw money at him; women, faded flowers when the race was over. Crowned with a wreath of myrtle leaves he was sent once around the course at a slow gallop to acknowledge the applause and Pompey, ignorant of who he was, threw his own wreath down to him. The significance of that could hardly have escaped a Northman. Orwic reined in to receive the wreath from an attendant, and as Pompey gave his seat to a substitute to preside over the last three races and turned to leave the box he waved his hand in acknowledgment of Orwic's courteous salute. The last three races were run in a half filled circus; the noisiest spectators had won money at exhilarating odds, and had gone home to exult about it and to rest in preparation for the much more thrilling entertainment to begin tomorrow.

It was night when Orwic came, spluttering and gasping at the prison stench and pinching at Tros' muscles through the bars.

"A man rots swiftly in a dungeon," he remarked, then laughed, a little reassured because Tros gripped him with a sudden strength that hurt.

"Tros, twenty men have tried to buy me from Helene! I was mobbed out there behind the stables! If it weren't that I'm supposed to be Helene's slave I never could have got here. I'd be drunker than a sailor! She pretended I was in danger from the other charioteers—and that was true, they'd kill me if they had a chance.

"She had her own slaves spirit me away and one of Zeuxis' fellows brought me here after dark. Good Ludd of Lunden, what a land of stinks! Helene is now spreading rumors that one of Pompey's men has had me thrown into the arena because she refused to sell me, and that he had bribed the peregrine prætor*, whatever that is, to refuse to interfere. It was difficult for me to understand, because the interpreter she had to use knew only a little Gaulish, but I gathered she is working up a great reception for us. What are we supposed to do? Fight lions? Men, too? Romans? I will gladly take a long chance for the sake of gutting half a dozen Romans! How are the men? And have the weapons come? Oh, by the way; Helene said this, or so I understood her; mind you, she is using an interpreter:

" 'If you deny me, you shall lose your ship. If you accept me, you have only to fight gallantly and you shall sail away.' "

"It sounded like a threat, Tros, but she is working day and night to save you. So is Zeuxis. I understood Zeuxis to say that Conops turned up and joined you in the *carceres*. What happened to him?"

Nepos came and with a nod of recognition let Orwic into Tros' cell. He was too busy for conversation, but he grinned and jerked his thumb up to encourage Tros. His face looked like a demon's in the lantern light, with tortured, nervous eyes that lacked sleep. Tros and Orwic talked until silence fell, then slept. That night the only men within the *carceres* who did not sleep were the suspicious guards, who prodded prisoners at intervals through cell bars to assure themselves that none had cheated death in the arena.

CHAPTER XV

THE LINK BREAKS

DAWN heard the roaring begin, as the populace poured into the seats to make sure none should forestall them by bribing the attendants. There were frequent fights, enormously enjoyed by those whose right to their seats was undisputed; and the shouting of the sweet-meat and provision vendors never ceased until the vast arena was a sea of sweating faces and the *equites* and senators began to occupy the seats reserved for them—seats that had been specially protected overnight by raising the wooden wall in front of them.

The *spina* down the midst had been removed. The Circus was a sea of clean sand glittering in sunlight. Colored awnings, stretched over the seats on decorated masts threw one half of the spectators into shade, except where hot rays shone through gaps where the awnings were roped together. There was a constant thunder from the canvas shaking in the morning wind. Roaring and baying of starved animals provided grim accompaniment. The blended tumult resembled thunder of surf on a rock-bound beach.

Tros, fettered as before, was allowed to take his place at the hole in the wall, with

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* The official whose duty it was to concern himself with foreigners, presiding over their litigation and, to some extent, protecting them.

Orwic chained beside him. Tros asked leave to inspect the weapons, but Nepos, irritable to the verge of madness, snarled at him:

"Govern yourself! I have had trouble enough! I have lost eight good guards!"

There was not an object left, in the inclosure by the gate that opened into the arena, which a prisoner might seize and turn into a weapon. The guards' clubs were fastened to their wrists by heavy thongs. The braziers were set in place behind a grille, where grimy slaves made ready to pass hot irons to the guards; and the first batch of prisoners—they who had staged the outbreak—were hustled in readiness into the irregularly shaped inclosure whose fourth side was the great door that should presently admit them to their death. They all wore clean but very scanty clothing, their own filthy garments having been ripped to rags in the struggle the previous night; and most of them, acutely conscious of the red-hot irons, managed to look alert almost eager for the tragedy. They joked. They even laughed. They called themselves the elephants' dinner, unaware yet that the method of their execution had been changed.

But first there was a ceremony in the sunshine. To a great heraldic blare of trumpets all the gladiators marched in through the gate that had admitted chariots the day before and, facing Pompey in a line, saluted him, one gladiator making a set speech. There were about three hundred armed men, very splendid in their different accoutrements, as dignified and perfect in shape and muscle as so many sculptor's gods.

Another blast of trumpets sounded and a mock-engagement took place—parry and thrust with wooden weapons, wonderfully executed but mechanical. It lasted until the crowd grew restless and began to whistle. Then another trumpet blast and all the gladiators marched out, leaving breathless silence in their wake—and two lone, nearly naked slaves who stood beside a trap-door fifty feet away from the eye-hole where Tros and Orwic watched. Each held a rope in one hand and with the other clung to one of the pegs by which they were to climb from danger.

Trumpets again, and some one swung the dungeon-gate, admitting a glare of dazzling sunlight. Slaves passed the hot irons and Nepos' men drove out the prisoners, flourishing the irons behind them and thrusting at those who were last. The great gate swung shut and for a minute the two score looked about them, blinking at the rows and rows of faces. Then the two slaves pulled the trap and jumped clear, one of them missing his grip. He was caught, dragged down and worried by the famished dogs that poured out of the trap yelping for their first meal in a week.

The crowd looked on in silence until two of the prisoners, mad with terror, ran as if to throw themselves prostrate before Pompey and beg to be spared. A dozen dogs gave chase, and there began to be a snarl of passion, punctuated by the shrill, excited screams of women, as the Romans felt the vice of it take hold of them. There was a choking roar when half a dozen dogs pulled down the runners; and the roar grew to a din that drowned the yelping when the other dogs all raced toward the prisoners who stood grouped near the dungeon-gate.

It was not over soon, nor easily. The dogs dragged some of the frenzied wretches to the sand and worried them, but there were six dogs to a man, all fighting for the victim's throat and stomach. Two or three men fought the dogs off with their fists. One slew a dog by choking him, and with the carcass guarded himself desperately until a great brute caught him by the arm and pulled him over backward. Utterly bereft of reason by the horror of it as another fifty dogs were loosed out of a trap, the remaining prisoners ran for their lives, until the last one went down under twenty dogs and the two packs started fighting one another.

MEN in masks then, representing the infernal regions, came out of a door beside the *spoliarium* to drag away the mangled bodies. Fifty men in line, with whips and torches, drove the dogs back through the hole they came from, and a dozen men with buckets scattered fresh sand where the blood lay. Then again the crowd stared at an empty rectangle of sand and two slaves, clinging to their pegs, stood by a trap-door facing Pompey's box. There was a gasp of expectation now. Each turn was always more absorbing than the last.

Nepos had herded fifty men and women into the inclosure behind the gate and they were begging to be told what fate awaited them. A woman fainted; they revived her with a hot iron. A man tried to kill a guard who mocked him, so they tore his muscles with the hooks and then, because he could not stand—or would not—they lashed him with cords to two others and so sent him into the arena when the door swung wide.

This time the slaves released three maddened elephants that raced around the circus before their little blood-shot eyes saw human beings at their mercy—beings of the same sort that had tortured them for three days in the darkened cage. There was a havoc then that pleased Rome to the marrow. Men were tossed over the barrier and thrown back to be finished off. One monster seized a woman in its trunk and beat her head off against the barrier beneath the Vestals' seats. Another chased a woman all around the Circus, seeming to enjoy her screams, and, when she fell at last, knelt slowly on her, as if kneeling in salute to Pompey. The crowd took that for an omen and yelled—

"Pompeius Magnus Imperator!"

There was no capturing those elephants. The maddened brutes were ready to face torches—anything. When they had crushed the last cowering victim and flattened his head in the sand they set off once again around the Circus, pausing here and there to trample on a crushed corpse and to scream back at the mob that roared with a frenzy no less bestial than theirs. The gladiators had to march out and despatch the elephants, and that was the crowd's first taste that day of anything resembling fair fight.

They took the side of the elephants, forever popular in Rome since Carthage fell and Rome learned to amuse herself with monsters that were dangerous to friend and foe alike on battlefields. A hundred gladiators armed with spears essayed to corner them and kill them where it would be easy to drag out the carcasses, and each time that the elephant charged through the line the crowd applauded madly, disregarding the pluck of the men who knelt and met them point-first—usually to be trampled, even though they thrust the spear home in the monster's belly.

Teams of horses dragged out the enormous carcasses. The men in masks came from the *spoliarium* with hooks to set under the arms of dead or injured gladiators and haul them out of sight. Fresh sand was strewn, and once again a bare arena sparkled in the sun.

And now the populace's blood was up. They were in no mood to be entertained with any lesser spectacle. The third turn had to be a climax that should glut their appetite for murder—as the men who managed the proceedings well knew—unless they were to yell death-verdicts for expensive gladiators later on. If satiated now with butchery they might let live the wounded men who presently should lie face-upward and appeal for magnanimity; and it took time and money, besides skill to train a gladiator, who, though he were too severely wounded to appear again in the arena, was as marketable as a horse. The fashion of employing gladiators as the personal attendants of even the women of rank had put a premium on wounded men from the arena. And these scarred and grizzled *passé* warriors, decked out far more gorgeously than in their palmiest fighting days, became expensive luxuries.

So a hundred criminals were herded into the inclosure by the dungeon gate—all "enemies of Rome," as Nepos thoughtfully remarked—and they were all clothed decently to make their death the more spectacular. Nor were they thrust forth as the others had been, to stand blinking and bewildered near the gate. They were herded by Nepos' guards into the very center of the Circus and there provided with wooden swords with which to make a mockery of self-defense. One man contrived to kill himself with his ridiculous weapon before the guards were out of the arena, and the guards had to hasten retreat at the cost of their own dignity; the master of the ceremonies ordered the traps raised instantly to prevent other victims from cheating the spectators.

Simultaneously, out of ten doors spaced at equal intervals around the arena came tigers, lions, wolves, bears and a great rhinoceros. The latter was received with roars of approbation, which apparently confused him; for a moment he stood blinking at the sunlight, then turned on a tiger suddenly, impaled him on his horn and crushed him against the wooden barricade. The tiger's claws provided all the necessary impulse that was lacking. He began to attack the other animals, but suddenly grew conscious of the helpless mass of humans in the midst of the arena and went straight at them like an avalanche on four legs.

HE WAS violence untrammelled—senseless—an incarnate cataclysm. He impaled his victims, tossed them, trampled down a swath among them, ripped them open, shook the blood and entrails from his eyes and charged until turning so often left him breathless and he stood with drooped head waiting to recover and begin again.

The lions, wolves and tigers were mere supernumerary skirmishers, who picked off victims scattered by the monster. Famished though they were, they dreaded him and kept clear. When he paused at last, and twenty human victims in a group stood back to back to guard themselves against the lions—and the lions sprang in, maddened by the ineffective weapons—the rhinoceros recovered zeal and rammed his weight into the mass, impaling indiscriminately, tossing a great lion in the air and mowing men into a mass of crimson pulp. Wolves tore the wounded. Tigers struck down any who escaped out of the carnage. And the Roman populace exulted as if all Elysium were at its feet.

Then more excitement as the gladiators entered to destroy the brutes that had destroyed the human victims. The extravagance of killing a rhinoceros that was known to have cost enough to feast a whole precinct of Rome raised the whole tone of the orgy in the estimation of the mob; and the big brute slew three gladiators before a luckier one knelt and drove a spear into his belly. Then a dozen others closed in on him with their swords and the horse-teams dragged the carcass out. The last of the tigers was slain by a *retiarius* with net and trident, after he had wounded half a dozen men.

While slaves were strewing fresh sand and the clamor of the crowd was gradually dying to a satisfied, expectant hum, Tros turned and found Nepos beside him.

"Your turn now," he said. "They are in a good mood."

He released Tros' wrists, then Orwic's, and gave Tros his sword. It was the same one he had left in Zeuxis' house. The Northmen came out of the cage like great bears growling, studying the axes handed to them by the prison guards.

"Lord Tros, these are not our weapons! These are rotten-hafted choppers for a housewife's kindling!"

They appeared to think that Tros had cheated them. Alternatively they were ready to wreak vengeance on the guards, who stood back, ready with their hooked clubs, reaching out hands through the grille to receive red-hot "persuaders" from the slaves.

Tros examined an ax. It was the sort of tool the Romans served out to the slaves whom it was reckoned inadvisable to trust with anything too nearly like a weapon—half the weight of the broad-bladed axes that the Northmen used.

"Those are the axes that Zeuxis sent," said Nepos. "There are twelve spears for the Britons. It is too late now for—"

"Too late now for Zeuxis!" Tros said grimly. "Nepos, will you—"

He had all but fallen from the dignity of Samothrace! If he had asked for vengeance on the Greek he would have undone in a moment all the spiritual values he had built into himself in twelve years' wandering! It needed no clairvoyance to appreciate that Zeuxis—characterless rascal—had succumbed at the last minute to the dread that Tros, if not slain in the Circus, might denounce him after all. It did take character to bit the instinct for revenge and, in the middle of a sentence, take advantage of old Nepos' genuine embarrassment.

"—it is too late now for Zeuxis to replace those. Probably his slaves misunderstood him. Can you give my men some other weapons?"

Nepos grinned.

"Aye! Tros, you should have been a Roman! Ho, there! Bring forth poniards and targets!"

They were long, lean poniards and shields of toughened bronze that clattered on the floor as fast as Nepos' guards could bring them from the store-room. And for Tros there was a buckler that a Thracian had carried to his death; a wave-edged scimiter a yard long and a wooden Gaulish shield with iron studs for Orwic.

Then the trumpets sounded and the great gate swung, admitting light that dazzled all the Northmen's eyes. They kept the futile axes—thrust the poniards into their belts—and followed Tros, who ordered Orwic out alone in front of him, ten paces in the lead.

"Remember now!" said Nepos, as the great gate swung shut at the nervous Britons' backs.

The Northmen marched in two lines behind Tros, Britons bringing up the rear, Tros keeping up a running admonition to prevent them from thinking their own thoughts and abandoning their discipline in panic. The enormous Circus and the mass of faces, leaning, leering, lusting—the anticipation that suggested ambush and the unpredictable—the glitter, glare and color, and the hush were likely to have unnerved Tros himself unless he had had men who looked to him to carry himself bravely and direct their destiny.

"SO—you will fight as I have taught you when we practised on the upper deck repelling boarders. Room for a weapon to swing, and no more, ranks closing swiftly when a man goes down and the wounded crawling to the center, keeping clear of feet. Each wounded man retains his weapon, to be passed to any comrade who is disarmed. Swift with the stab; very slow to recover; the eyes on the enemy's—ears listening for orders! When the lions come, steady—and step forward as they spring. Then duck and stab!"

They were midway to the center before a small group of spectators recognized the gallant looking youngster in the lead. But then, as if some one were organizing a demonstration, they began to shout his name:

"Ignotus! Ignotus!"

Recognition swelled into a roar as Orwic waved the wreath he had received as victor and then crowned himself. They who had won money betting on him doubled and redoubled the applause until the whole arena was aroar with curiosity and new excitement, changing—so it seemed—the very atmosphere. No better man than Orwic could have strode alone to take that thundering ovation; he was to the manner born, and though he walked without the measured Roman dignity, his own was no less captivating. He had won the crowd's mood with a gesture, and the Northmen, ignorant of what was happening, accepted all the acclamation as their own due; Tros could feel their changed emotion as they formed up at his back and stood in line in front of Pompey, with the white-robed Vestals gazing at them from the draped seats of their own inclosure, well to the front, on Pompey's right.

No Vestal made the slightest sign that Tros detected; they were stern-faced women with their faces framed in white—apparently emotionless; four arbiters of life and death. The obligation to attend the sacred flame of Vesta made it always necessary for at least three to remain on duty to relieve each other. To the right and left of Pompey's box the senators and *equites*—no interest less thrilling would have brought them from their country villas—sat with faces flushed, their attitude an effort to appear calm although every unstudied movement betrayed tense excitement. They were laughing cynically—chattering—their voices drowned by the enormous volume of the crowd's roar.

Pompey was talking to some one who knelt at his side—by his costume a slave, by his bearing a messenger. A dozen gaudily dressed Romans, men and women,* who were Pompey's guests, appeared to listen eagerly to what the messenger was saying; not an eye in all that sumptuously decorated box was turned toward the men about to die in the arena. The salute they gave was unreturned, although the mob applauded the raised axes of the Northmen as a new barbaric detail introduced for their amusement. Tros growled to Orwic:

"Ready now! I know the gods have stirred! They love men best whom they find resolute!"

He faced his men; and if he felt afraid they never knew it!

"Let not death deprive me of one seaman, for I need you all!" he shouted.

Then, with his men behind him, he followed Orwic to the very midst of the arena; and as he turned he saw that Pompey leaned out of his box to speak to the Great Vestal, who was nearest to him of the four majestic women. The attendant slave-women pressed forward as if to protect the Vestals' privacy. Tros saw the old gray Vestal's† lips move. When he shouted to his men again there was a note of triumph in his voice:

"Think you, has Odin lost the way to Rome? Does Thor sleep? And is Ludd of Lunden rotting in the Thames? Forget you are in Rome, and fight now for your own gods! Steady!"

Faithful to his promise, Nepos had contrived that the lions should be kept in until Tros was ready. He had almost overdone the kindness and the crowd was giving vent to its impatience when the doors were raised at last from five dens and the yellow brutes came hurrying out into the sunlight. There were marks on some of them of hot iron. There was not a second's interval before they saw their quarry and began to creep up, crouching, blinking, stalking for a flank attack—so many of them that Tros never tried to count.

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*The Circus was the only public spectacle at which the sexes were not separated.

†The Vestals were chosen as children and obliged to take the vow for a period of thirty years, but it was rarely that a Vestal availed herself of the privilege of retirement and many continued in office until they died of old age.

But there was no opening in the solid square of men that faced four ways at once. Tros stood alone, in front, on one side; Orwic on the other to stiffen the Britons, who were not so easy to make battle-brave. And, since they two looked easier to kill, there was a sudden lightning motion nearly too swift for the eye to follow as three brutes at once leapt at each of them, snarling. Then the melée! There was not a second to be spared for rallying the men or for a thought of anything but butchery—ax, poniard and sword outlicking with the speed of light as fifty lions leaped after the first and flung themselves against the solid square. One dragged a Briton down and through the gap three others leaped in, to be slain by Northmen. Bleeding from a claw-wound, stepping forward with his buckler raised, Tros drove his long sword through a lion's heart and turned to face another, stooping to entice the brute to spring, then straightening himself suddenly and thrusting upward. He could only fight and hope his men were standing firm. He found breath for their battle-cry and roared it:

"Odin! Odin!"

HE COULD hear their answering roar, but it was all mixed up with lions' snarling and the tumult from the mob, until—as suddenly as the assault began—the butchery was over and he turned to see his square unbroken, three men and himself but slightly injured, and one Briton dead. His Northmen grinned at him, filling their lungs and breathing heavily—awaiting praise. He nodded to them, which was praise enough. Three lions dragged themselves away, blood dripping from them, and a fourth, uninjured, raced around the Circus looking for a chance to leap the barrier. The Northmen showed him half a dozen rotten axes broken, but Orwic laughed gaily from the far side of the square—

"Tros, don't you wish those brutes were Romans!"

There was nothing now to make the crowd impatient—not a second's pause. A gate swung open at the end that faced the *carceres*; Numidians came running in, their ostrich-feather plumes all nodding as they shook their shields in time to a barbaric chant, their long spears flashing in the sun.

Tros turned his eyes toward the Vestal Virgins, but they seemed not to be looking. Pompey was still leaning from his box, apparently engaged in conversation with the Virgo Vestalis Maxima.

There were sixty, not fifty Numidians, and they appeared to have been told their task was easy. Their black, almost naked bodies shone like polished ebony as they began to play and prance to draw the crowd's applause. Groups of three gave chase to the wounded lions and slew them with their long spears, while a dozen others stalked the one uninjured beast and, finally surrounding him, coaxed him to spring, when they knelt and received him on spear-points.

Hurriedly Tros put his Britons in the center of the square and made them surrender their spears to the Northmen whose axes were broken.

"Watch your chance and sieze the weapons of the fallen enemy!" he commanded. Then, to the Northmen, "Fight as if repelling boarders! If the square breaks, form again!"

He left Orwic on the far side of the square, for the Numidians were circling to attack on all four sides at once, their leader, a lean Titan of oil-polished ebony with a leopard-skin over his shoulder, shouting as he opposed himself to Tros—

And in a second they engaged, on-rushing like a wind-storm of their native desert—fierce as fire—undisciplined as animals. Their leader leaped, down-stabbing with his spear—Tros' long sword took him in the throat and, crashing above the tumult, he could hear the crowd roar "*habet!*" as another black man seized his buckler, bearing down on it to make an opening for two others' spears. Out licked a Northman's ax and bit into a feathered head. As suddenly, Tros' long sword saved the Northman. A poniard, up-stabbing with the heft of all the Baltic under it, went home into encrimsoned ebony, and there was room again—time for a glance over-shoulder.

"Odin! Odin!"

The unbroken square was fighting mad,

and through the corner of his eye Tros saw the unarmed Britons crawling between legs to seize Numidian spears—one Northman down, a Briton dragging him—and then a riot-roar as the spectators cheered on the Numidians—a howling onslaught, and the crash of battle in which no man knew what happened, except that the rush ceased and there were black men bleeding on the sand. A third of the Numidians fell back and hesitated, leaderless and numbed by the ovation of the crowd, that had encouraged them at first.

"Lord Tros, we stand firm!" cried a Northman, and fell dead. A Briton dragged his body to the center of the square, and the other Northmen closed the gap, their left arms measuring the space to make sure there was room to fight. Then Orwic's voice:

"All over, Tros! They have no more courage. Shall we charge and rout them?"

The Numidians retreated and began arguing, until a few took dead men's spears and, rushing to within six paces, hurled them; but the bucklers stopped those missiles easily and the spectators jeered, beginning to shout for action, booing, whistling, bellowing "Ignotus!"

"Tros, I beg you, let us charge!" cried Orwic.

But Tros was aware of two things. Pompey was still talking to the Vestal—and the great gate at the end of the arena had been opened. Two long lines of gladiators, helmeted and armed with sword and buckler, began marching in with the mechanical precision of a consul's bodyguard, saluting with a flash of raised swords as the last pair entered and the great gate closed behind them. Tros could hardly make his voice heard then above the thundering ovation of the crowd:

* * *

"CHANGE formation—into two lines—backs toward the Vestals! Orwic, stand by me!"

He bade them let the wounded lie now, for he knew the pass was desperate. He formed his line into a semi-circle with its ends retired toward the side where the Vestals and Pompey and all the senators and *equites* were seated.

"Now ye shall show me what Odin begat, and whether Ludd of Lunden raised a brood of men! Behold—those gladiators drive the black men down on us, and we must slay or be slain! Give ground very slowly until we have our backs against the wall, taking care we are not surrounded!"

There was no time for another word. A blast of trumpets and the gladiators, forty of them, separating into pairs with the precision of a guard of honor on parade, came forward at the run, outflanking the bewildered Numidians, urging them forward with gestures, presently stabbing at those in the rear. The Numidians, clustering, not understanding, then suddenly desperate, broke, surged, gathered again, stabbed back at the gladiators—and then fled before them, frenzied, brandishing their spears—stark mad—a whirlwind. And then—shambles!

It was cataclysm without sense or reason in it—slaughter wrought unconsciously, the muscles moving as the heart beat, without signal from the brain—sheer wanton instinct let loose in an orgy of destruction—with the rolling whites of men's eyes, crimson blood on black skin, scornfully handsome Roman faces under brazen helmets at the rear, and a deafening din, like a thunder of surf, from the onlookers, the only memory that survived.

Thereafter, no pause, but a change of movement and a measured method in the madness, with a gradual return of conscious will. The gladiators smiled, and that was something. They invited death as if it were a playmate; they inflicted it with scientific skill aloof from malice; they were artful and deliberate, their recklessness a mask beneath which awful energy and calculation lurked. They were as sudden as forked lightning, with an air of having all eternity in which to study their opponents' method.

Tros found himself engaged by one young veteran of twenty-five, bronze-muscled, with a glow of health like satin on his skin, and on his lips the smile of fifty victories. He had the short sword of the Roman legionary and a big bronze shield, short bronze greaves and a gleaming helmet; with the exception of those he was almost naked, so that every movement he made went rippling along his skin.

The moment he singled out Tros and engaged him the spectators began roaring "Glaucus! Glaucus!" and it sickeningly dawned on Tros that, though this man might have promised Nepos, the spectators were in no mood to spare any wounded combatant. They were yelling for massacre, cruelty, death, for the uttermost peak of emotion; and Glaucus, all-wise in the signs, with a glance at the crowd beneath the buckler upraised on his arm, confirmed it—

"*Est habendum!*"

He was still good-natured. Attitude and smile were invitations to submit to the inevitable and receive the thrust under the breast-bone that should end the matter swiftly. There was not a trace of malice in his smile when he discerned that Tros refused that easy death. He parried Tros' long, lunging thrust and sprang in with a laugh to crush an instep with his heel and stab before Tros could give ground.

Earth, sky and walls appeared to shake under the thunder of the tumult when the favorite of Rome went reeling backward and fell headlong, tripping over a dead Nubian. He had not realized he had a swordsman facing him—that that old instep trick, and the reply to it, was something Tros learned long before ever a razor touched his face. He rolled and sprang clear with a cat's agility, and laughed, but he was at Tros' mercy if a pair of gladiators had not cut in to protect him. And then melée; for a Northman came to Tros' aid, and three other Northmen battle-axed their adversaries, springing instantly to Orwic's side. Tros slew two men, and the crowd began to shout his praises, before Glaucus, angry now and venomous at last, called off two other gladiators and again opposed himself to Tros.

THERE was a sharp command from Glaucus. The other gladiators formed themselves into a phalanx. The expectant crowd drew breath like one thrilled monster, greedy for the coming massed assault—the staggering, reeling line—and then, when Tros should have been separated from his men, the final single combat.

But the art of generalship lies in unexpectedness.

"This is none of my seeking. Let the gods accept responsibility!" thought Tros. And with a gesture and one exclamation—instantly—he formed his double line into a wedge, himself its apex, bringing forth a roar of admiration from the crowd, who, loathing discipline themselves, adored to watch it.

Gradually wheeling, with a crabwise movement, sullenly, Tros gave ground, offering his flank to tempt the phalanx to an indiscretion. And because the gladiators knew Fabian tactics would only annoy the crowd they shouted and came on, aiming their sudden rush so as to cut Tros off from the arena wall and drive him out toward the center where he and his survivors could be surrounded.

The spectators went mad with excitement. An ocean of sound, as if the very sky were falling, drowned the clash of weapons. Tros moved on the arc of a parabola and struck the phalanx sidewise with his wedge, splitting it diagonally with the fury of a Baltic blast, his Northmen bellowing their bull-mouthed battle-cry.

They burst into the phalanx on its left hand, and the gladiators lost formation as they tried to turn. Glaucus, skillfully avoiding Orwic, plunged into the melée, savagely hurling men out of his way and yelling challenges to Tros. It was a milling shambles, weight against weight, fury against fury, with the gladiators losing—and losing their heads, too, as their numbers thinned. All the axes were broken. Northmen and Britons alike fought now with poniards and spears.

Then Glaucus reached Tros, springing at him from behind a gladiator whom Tros slew with a lunging thrust that bent his buckler and went past it deep into the man's breast. That mighty blow left Tros extended, with his buckler useless on his left arm and his sword-point in a man's ribs. Glaucus sprang to stab him between neck and shoulder.

"Ah-h-h!"

The crowd roared too soon. Orwic's buckler intervened and Glaucus, springing backward to avoid the Briton's swiping scimiter, tripped over a dead gladiator.

"*Habet!*"

But the crowd was wrong again; Glaucus was uninjured—instantly up on his feet and murder in his eye. There were five Northmen and four Britons down, but twice that number of Glaucus' men lay crimsoning the sand. The gladiators, recognizing that their case was desperate, sprang back into line again behind their leader.

Instantly Tros realigned his wedge. He did not dare to take his eyes off Glaucus for more than a second, but he spared one swift glance at the Vestals. The Vestalis Maxima was still talking to Pompey, who leaned forward from his seat, apparently engaged in heated argument; his face was flushed. There was something unexpected happening. The spectators seemed aware of it; they swayed; there was a new note in the tumult.

But there was also a new move in Glaucus' mind; he spread his arms and shouted. Instantly his men split into two divisions and attacked the wedge on either flank, Glaucus watching his chance to charge at Tros when the weight of the assault should have driven the Northmen back a yard or two and left him unprotected.

For a breath—ten—twenty breaths the wedge held—until suddenly the Northmen lost their heads and charged to meet the onslaught, breaking line and bellowing their "Odin! Odin!" as they locked shields against the gladiators' and opposed sheer strength and fury against skill. As swiftly as leaves whirl and scatter in the wind the tight formation broke up into single combats.

And now, again, the crowd went frantic with excitement. Glaucus, favorite of fortune, winner of a hundred fights, had met his destiny at last! Tros had at him in silence, grimly, minded to make swift work of it and slay him, to be free to rally his own scattered men. He went at Glaucus—ears, eyes, will all concentrated on the duel to the death.

There was a blare of trumpets—but it might have been a thousand miles away. There was a man's voice pitched against the thunder of the crowd—but it was a voice heard in a dream. There was a yelping, snarling anger note in the crowd's increasing tumult—but that only matched his own dissatisfaction with the gods, who had provided him no better opportunity than this to save the day. He had no inclination to kill Glaucus, but he knew he must.

GLAUCUS sprang like a leopard, and suddenly feinted, receiving Tros' lunge on his buckler and ducking in to get the advantage with his short sword at close quarters. But the quick stab missed by a hand's breadth and Tros' next stroke shore away the crest of Glaucus' helmet, the terrific impact hurling back the gladiator on his heels. There was never a doubt about the outcome from that second. Glaucus fought a losing battle with the desperate determination of a veteran—cunning, alert, experimenting with a hundred tricks, now giving ground, now feigning weariness, now swifter than a flash of lightning. Twice he drew blood. Once, with a whirlwind effort that brought tumults from the crowd, he forced Tros backward against a writhing gladiator's body and then, buckler against buckler, almost tripped him. But the effort spent itself and Tros' strength overwhelmed him. Glaucus' own blood trickled in his eyes from where the long sword shore the helmet-brass and bit into his scalp. He shook his head, like an embattled bull and sprang in blindly trying to smash down Tros' guard with his buckler. For a second they were breath to breath with locked shields, and he spat in Tros' face, stabbing furiously, until Tros hurled him backward and the long sword licked out like a tongue of flame.

The sword was swifter than the eye, yet thought was swifter.

"*Habet!*"

The crowd's yelp was like a thunder-clap. But swifter than a year's events that flash by in a dream was the vision of Nepos' face—the memory of Nepos' voice—the thought of Glaucus' willingness to wound and then ask mercy for his victim. Between syllable and syllable of "*Habet!*" the point lowered and went lunging into Glaucus' thigh.

"Down with you!" Tros growled and, as the Roman staggered, beat him to the sand with a terrific buckler blow. He set his foot on him.

"Lie still!" he ordered, as the Roman tried to squirm free.

Now he became conscious of the trumpet blasts, and of the man's voice pitched against the din. The crowd was screaming savagely for Glaucus' death; they lusted for the last refinement of mob-cruelty, the fun of turning on their favorite, condemning him as he appealed for the mercy he had so often begged for others.

Tros raised his sword and glanced at Pompey's box. The triumvir was gone! The box was empty! Some of his Northmen were cheering him. He could not count how many men were killed; his own head swam, but through the corner of his eye he saw the dungeon door was open. Nepos and his men were dragging wounded men into a group. There were thirty or forty simultaneous fights going on among the upper rows of seats, and officials were swarming up over the barriers to enforce order; others were already driving the spectators out through the exits at the rear. But the Vestals were still seated, although their attendants seemed to be urging them to go. Tros threw up his sword and asked for Glaucus' life. All four Vestals waved their handkerchiefs; and the next he knew, Nepos was nudging him.

"Down on your knee!" commanded Nepos, signing to his men, who set their hooks under Glaucus' armpits and began to drag him away.

Tros knelt. The Vestals waved their handkerchiefs again.

"That is enough for me," said Nepos. "Swiftly!"

The men in masks were dragging out the dead and one was killing wounded gladiators, drawing a heavy sword across their throats, but Nepos would not let him kill Tros' wounded men. Orwic, bleeding and breathless, came to examine Tros' wounds, but Nepos was impatient. The crowd was raging.

"Come!" he commanded. He appeared to think that Tros knew what had happened. "Bid your men carry their wounded, and be swift before your gods reverse themselves!"

The dungeon guards hustled them out as swiftly as the wounded could be dragged and carried, and the great door of the *carceres* slammed shut behind them, deadening the angry tumult of the crowd.

"That is the first time in the history of Rome!" he said. "What gods do you pray to? I myself would like to sacrifice to gods who can accomplish that!"

Tros answered sullenly:

"Eleven good men dead—and all these wounded! Rot me such a lousy lot of gods!"

* * *

HE BROUGHT a doctor, whose accomplishment was cauterizing wounds with red-hot iron and was bitterly offended because Tros preferred the pine-oil dressing that a Druid gave him and which he kept in his haversack; he dressed the Northmen's wounds, then Orwic's, then his own.

"There is magic in this," he said, offering the flask to Nepos. "I will give you what is left of it if you will tell me now what happened."

"Julia died!" said Nepos. "Didn't you hear the announcer? There came two messengers, and one told Pompey, but another told the Vestals. Pompey would have let the games go on, not daring to offend the crowd, but the Vestals said shame on him and—so the guard near Pompey's box told me—they threatened to predict a great disaster to the Roman arms, and to ascribe the blame to Pompey, if he disobeyed them. They thought a deal of Julia. So did everybody. Rome will have to go in mourning. I will bet you fifty *sesterces* that Pompey will do all he can to keep the news from Julius Cæsar until he can get ready to defend himself. The link that kept them from each other's throats is broken."

"And what now?" Tros asked him.

"You are free, my friend. The Vestals ordered it. But not yet. I will keep you in the dungeon until darkness makes it easier to pass unrecognized."

There was wisdom in delay, particularly as Tros did not want to be seen escaping down the Tiber. But it was hardly an hour before Helene came and sent a message by Nepos.

"Speak through the gate with her," he advised, and came and listened in the shadow where the great steps turned under the entrance arch.

"Tros!" exclaimed Helene, her lips trembling with excitement, "you would do well to make haste! All Rome knows the Vestals have released you. Zeuxis is afraid of you; he knows Conops came, and he has warned one of Pompey's men that your ship will try to pick you up in Ostia. The gallopers have gone to warn the captains of the triremes! If you try to go by chariot to Ostia they will find excuse to bar the road against you; and they will certainly seize your ship! But I have the permits to take stage to Gaul, and none will expect you to take that route. Leave your men behind, and come before you are murdered!"

Tros wondered whether it was she or Zeuxis who had contrived that danger to the ship—and even whether it was true at all, although he knew that either of them would be capable of doing it. He did not care to risk Helene's temper by refusing her point blank, for he could read determination in her eyes. He had to invent subterfuge, and suddenly.

"I owe Zeuxis nine pearls. Give them to him," he said, pulling out his leather pouch. "Furthermore, give him this," he said, producing the ivory *tessera*. "And tell him, I denounce *hospitium;* from this hour we are enemies. Then tell him I will not leave Rome until I have repaid him for the rotten axes that that he gave my men! You shall have the pearls I owe you—after I reach Britain—after Cæsar manumits you. Slaves are not allowed to wear pearls."

"You will come with me? By road to Gaul?"

"If there is no other way—but only after I have made arrangements for my men. They are good men and the gods would rot me if I gave them no chance; also some of them are badly hurt. I have arranged to send them down the Tiber, and if all goes well they may find some way of escaping to their own land. So if you will meet me one hour after dark down by the fish-wharf near the bridge, I will be free to answer you. Bring Zeuxis with you. Think of some way of deceiving him that he will not meet me, and manage so that I shall find him where he can't escape—down there beside the fish-wharf in the dark. I think the gods would not approve if I should miss my reckoning with Zeuxis."

"You and your gods!" she laughed, as bitterly as if he had insulted her. But she nodded, and went to do his bidding, careful not to stay too long so near the dungeon gate because of loiterers—and because there was a bad stench coming through the entrance tunnel.

"You will kill Zeuxis?" Nepos asked, taking Tros' arm as he returned into the dungeon. "Better let me have him crucified. I can contrive that easily."

"Friend Nepos, I would rather that an enemy should kill me than that I should be afraid to face him. Will you do me this last favor, that you let me attend to Zeuxis? I *must* silence him, or he will turn next on Helene, who has done me no wrong that I know of."

It was pitch dark when the party filed out of the dungeon with the wounded Northmen leaning between comrades and one carried on a stretcher in the midst. The streets were nearly empty, and whoever was abroad at that hour took care to avoid so large a company of stalwarts, who were very likely gladiators carrying a drunken master home. The slaves at the city gate were playing dice beside a torch and hardly looked up. Nearly all the porters near the bridge-foot were asleep, and the long, shadowy fish-wharf, built of wooden piles, appeared deserted as Tros led the way down creaking wooden steps. He saw the men whom Conops had brought, all sitting glooming by a bonfire built of broken crates before a low shed, with their oars like a gridiron's shadow leaning up against the shed wall. And he saw the boats, their noses to the bank within a stone's throw of the men. For one long, hopeful minute he believed he had escaped Helene.

But she stepped out of a shadow suddenly and took his hand.

"Tros, here is Zeuxis! He supposed he was to meet a man who was willing to murder you for half your pearls!"

* * *

SHE pointed into shadow and Tros sprang. He dragged out Zeuxis, squealing, shook him like rat until his breath was gone, then gave him to two Northmen to be gagged and bound. The men by the bonfire recognized Tros then and ran to greet him; he had hard work to prevent them from making an uproar.

"Man the boats!" he ordered. "Silence!" Then he watched until they threw the Greek into the first boat as it nosed the wharf. When that was done, and all his men were loaded in the three boats, he turned on Helene suddenly.

"Are you alone?" he asked her. "Are you safe?"

"I have servants yonder. Are you coming? What will they do with Zeuxis? Drown him? Sell him into slavery?"

"He comes with me to Britain," Tros said grimly. "I am taking him to save you from his tongue. If his affairs don't prosper in his absence, perhaps Cæsar may recompense him! Farewell, Helene! You may look for manumission and the pearls when I have said my say in Cæsar's ear!"

He jumped into the foremost boat, but she seized the painter and passed it cleverly around a bollard. He could have cut it with his sword but hesitated, wondering what treachery she might do yet if he should leave her feeling scorned. She solved that problem for him.

"Tros," she said, "they have ordered out the triremes!"

"How do you know," he demanded. Whereat she laughed a little.

"Do you think I trusted you? Tros, you are lost unless you come with me to Gaul!"

"So it was you who suggested triremes, was it? You who told Pompey to capture my ship? Well, we shall see!"

He cut the painter with his sword and left her standing there. He could see her figure, like a shadow, waving, until the boats swept out of sight around a bend, and the last he heard of her was his own name rolling musically down the river!

"Tros! Tros! Turn while it is not too late! Tros!"

Danger was as nothing to the thought of an entanglement with her! Lions had not scared him half as much! Escape from the arena had not brought as much relief as leaving her behind! And all the way down-Tiber, as he urged his men and beat time for the oars, he gloried quite as much in having saved her from betrayal by the Greek and saved himself out of her clutches, as in having won the respite for the Britons for which he had risked his life and everything!

THEY passed by Ostia at midnight, seeing nothing but the watchmen's lanterns and the low line of the receding hills on either hand, with here and there a group of shadowy masts inshore. As dawn approached they rested on their oars and let the longshore current bear them northward as they kept all eyes strained for the three great sails of Tros' ship. Orwic was the first to see them, yelling and waving his arms in the boat ahead. But Tros was the first to see two other sails, a mile apart and a mile to seaward of his own ship, that appeared as dawn sent shimmering light along the dancing sea.

Sigurdsen was standing in to search the harbor mouth. The triremes had put out to sea in darkness and had worked to windward of him. They were closing in now under oar and sail to force him into Ostia or crush him on their boiling bronze beaks.

By the time Tros stepped on to his own poop there was not a quarter of a mile between the three ships and the triremes' oars were beating up the sea into a white confusion. They were coming along two legs of a triangle before a brisk breeze.

"Out oars! Drums and cymbals!"

Tros took the helm from Sigurdsen and put the ship about.

"Let go the halyards! Downhaul!"

As the three great purple sails came down on deck, the trireme captains mistook that for a signal of surrender and slightly changed course so to range along side, one on either hand. Tros set the drums and cymbals beating.

"Conops!" he commanded. "Run along the benches and set half-speed but bid them splash and make it look like a panic! When I give the word, then backs and legs into the work and pull!"

The *Liaafil*, tin-bottomed and as free from weed as on the day Tros launched her in the Thames, began to gather headway and the trireme captains saw that she intended to escape between them. Judging her speed, they changed helm simultaneously, leaning over in the wind and leaping forward to the shouts of the oar-overseers, their rams awash in the rising sea. The *Liafail's* oars splashed as if the crew were panic-stricken, until Tros threw up his right hand for a double drum-beat.

"Row!" he shouted; and the voice of Conops echoed him.

There were seconds while the issue hung in balance—seconds during which Tros dreaded that the trireme captains might have speed, too, in reserve—but he could see the weeds under their hulls. Or that they might have manned their arrow-engines—though it was not probable that they had had time enough to get their fighting crews on board. He beat time frantically for the drums and cymbals, setting an ever faster oar-beat, doubting his own eye, mistrusting his judgment, believing he had overrated his own ship's speed and underguessed that of the triremes. Wind and wave were against him.

But his great bronze serpent in the bow laughed gaily, shaking its tongue as it danced on the waves and, too late, both the trireme captains saw he had escaped them. They changed helm, tried to back oars, let go sheets and halyards—and crashed, each beak into the other's bow, with a havoc of falling spars and breaking timber and the oars all skyward as the rowers sprawled among the benches.

"Catapult?" suggested Sigurdsen. "They are a big mark. We could hit them with the first shot."

Conops came on deck to watch the triremes rolling, locked together, sinking.

"Arrows?" he suggested, fingering the 'paulin housing of an arrow-engine.

"Let be!" Tros answered. "Let the gods attend to them, and maybe spare them for the sake of Nepos and the Vestal Virgins!"

For a while he laughed at the absurdity of coupling the Roman headsman and the Vestals in one category. Then:

"Have we wine aboard? Serve wine to all

hands. There's a long pull and a hard blow to the coast of Britain. May the gods give us gales from astern and no scurvy!"

CHAPTER XVI

BRITAIN. LATE SUMMER, B.C. 52

A ROW of bonfires on a beach glared fitfully. The skeletons of ships and a mystery of moving shadows on a white chalk cliff suggested through squalls of rain a battlefield of fabulous, enormous monsters. The bonfire flames were colored by the sea-salt and by copper fastenings that men were raking out as swiftly as the timber was consumed; the figures of the men suggested demons of the underworld attending furnaces where dead men burned their baggage on the banks of Styx. A half gale blew the flames irregularly. A tremendous thunder and the grinding of surf on shingle sang of high tide and a gradually falling sea.

Under a rough shed made of ships' beams with a mass of sand and seaweed heaped to windward Cæsar sat, pale and alert, with a list of the ships on his knees. Two veterans guarded the hut, their shields held to protect them as they leaned on spears and stared into the rain. A tribune, cloaked and helmeted, sat on a broken chest near Cæsar's feet, attending to a stream of very precisely worded orders, that were being written on a tablet by a Gaulish slave as fast as Cæsar could dictate them.

"That will be all now. Work will begin at dawn," said Cæsar, taking the tablet from the slave and frowning over it in the unsteady light from a bronze ship's lantern hanging from a beam. "Curius, will you address the men at daybreak and assure them, that though Cæsar accepts disaster he is not resigned to it. A difficulty is an opportunity to prove that Cæsar is invincible. The fleet is broken—by the sea, not by the Britons. It will be seen how swiftly Romans can rebuild it. And now see who is out there in the dark. I heard a voice."

"Wind, imperator."

"I heard a voice. Whose is it?"

Decimus Curius got to his feet with an air of not relishing the weather. He was sleepy, and stiff from exposure to storms. He drew his cloak around him, shuddering as he stepped into the darkness. Presently his voice called from where a campfire shone on one plate of his armor:

"There is a man who says his name is Tros of Samothrace. He is alone."

Cæsar's eyes changed, but the slave, who watched narrowly, detected no confession of surprize; only the lean right forefinger went up to straighten his thin hair, after which he adjusted the folds of his tunic and cloak.

"You may bring him in," he said, in a tone of voice that might have meant he had expected such a visitor.

Tros loomed into the lantern light; the tribune at his side, though helmeted, looked hardly half as big.

"It is a bitter wind that blows you into my camp as a rule!" said Cæsar, "but in this instance the omen arrives after the event! My fleet already has been wrecked. What other misfortune can Tros of Samothrace invent for me?"

"I am the messenger of destiny," Tros answered, and Cæsar stared at him, as it might be, curiously.

"Have you dropped out of the heavens, Tros? Or is your ship also broken on the beach?"

Tros answered with a gruff laugh.

"My ship imitates the magnanimity of Cæsar! She will wreak no havoc with that remnant of your fleet that frets its cables off a lee shore—simply because Cæsar will receive me as an envoy, subject to the usages of truce."

"Provide him with a seat," said Cæsar, and the slave pulled up the broken chest under the lantern light.

"You interest me, Tros. You are a very circumspective man for one so deaf to his own interests. How often have I offered you my friendship?" Cæsar asked.

"As frequently as I gave opportunity!" Tros answered. "I am not your friend. I said, I am the messenger of destiny. I wish to speak with you alone."

The tribune, close behind Tros, pointing at his long sword, shook his head emphatically. Cæsar smiled, the deep, long lines around his mouth absorbing shadow, making his aristocratic face look something like a skull. He nodded.

"You may leave us, Curius."

The tribune shrugged his shoulders.

"Cæsar, fortune has not favored us of late," he protested. "You heard him with his own mouth say—"

"Curius, when I let fear control me, I will not begin with enemies who candidly profess their enmity! You may leave us, too," he added, glancing at the the slave.

Still standing—peering once or twice into the darkness to make sure the tribune and the slave were out of earshot—Tros looked straight at Cæsar and repeated the one secret word that the Vestalis Maxima had whispered to him. Cæsar looked almost startled, but he made no comment beyond signing to Tros to sit down on the chest.

"HAVE you conquered the Britons?" Tros asked him.

"Very far from it," said Cæsar. "Their chief, Caswallon, is an excellent general with a sort of genius that needs time and persistence to defeat. Their chariots are ably handled. So is their cavalry, and I am very short of cavalry, which makes it difficult to bring the Britons to a pitched engagement, but we will do better when the storms cease and the leaves are off the trees. You may say I have defeated them in one sense. Their army is scattered. But they are able to raid my long line of communication and to harass my foraging parties. I have seen fit to withdraw my army to the coast and to await reenforcements from Gaul. Meanwhile, there is this misfortune to my fleet. So—now that I have satisfied your curiosity, assuage mine. What do you think to gain by knowing all this?"

"I am here," said Tros, "to turn you out of Britain!"

Cæsar smiled at him.

"I admire your confidence, but I think you misjudge my character. When I invade, I conquer. If you have nothing else to suggest—well; I suppose what is left of my fleet is at the mercy of your ship, since you say so, but—I can imagine worse predicaments. Surely yours is equally unpleasant!"

"I am an ambassador," said Tros.

"So I understood. You made use of a word that tempted me to speak you very frankly. Why not discharge your embassy instead of talking nonsense?"

Tros, with an elbow resting on his knee, leaned forward until his face was not a yard from Cæsar's. He spoke in a low voice, slowly and distinctly:

"These are the words of the Virgo Vestalis Maxima: 'Bid Cæsar turn his eyes toward Rome! Bid him look to Gaul, that when the time comes he may leave Gaul tranquil at his rear!' "

"You bring me dangerous advice!" said Cæsar; but his eyes had changed again; he seemed to be considering, behind a mask of rather cynical amusement, calculated to make Tros feel he had blundered into too deep counsels.

"Julia is dead," Tros added, leaning back and turning his head away, as if the statement were an afterthought. He had been eight-and-twenty days at sea and thought it probable that Cæsar had that news already. But the corner of his eye detected absolute surprize, and as he looked back, Cæsar leaned and gripped him by the shoulder.

"Are you lying?"

"That is for you to judge," Tros answered. "Have you led so many men and need to ask that?"

"How did they keep that news from me?"

"If I were Pompey I would take good care to keep it from you until my army was as powerful as yours!" said Tros. "But I am very glad I am not Pompey. I foresee the end of that proud—"

"Very noble Roman!" Cæsar interrupted, finishing the sentence.

Tros sat motionless. The Roman imperator stared into the night beyond him, seeming to read destiny among the shadows and to hear it in the dirging of the sea. The very pebbles on the beach cried *"Cæ—sar!"* The surf's thunder was ovation.

"It is not yet time," he said at last. And I must conquer Britain."

"Nay! The very gods themselves are warning you!" said Tros. "Two seasons running they have wrecked your ships!"

"Unless memory deceives me, it was you the first time," Cæsar answered, showing not the least trace of resentment. "Generalship, Tros, consists in following an advantage instantly—which is why I doubt you now. You were blind then to your opportunity. Shall I believe you have turned suddenly into a—what was it you called yourself?—a messenger of destiny! But why the boasting?"

"Cæsar!" Tros stood up and raised his right fist, holding his left palm ready for the coming blow of emphasis. His amber eyes shone like a lion's in the lantern-light. "Thrice I might have slain you fairly! If I cared to deal death treacherously, all your legions could not save you now! But I am here to save the Britons, not to injure you, who are resolved to conquer Britain for your own pride's sake and for the luster it may add to your already famous name. But you must choose between Rome or Britain, because what shall hinder Pompey from arousing Gaul against you and then taking the dictatorship while you reconquer what is yours now if you but turn and occupy it? Is it plunder you crave? I have deposited a thousand pearls with the Vestalis Maxima for you, to make that breastplate for the Venus Genetrix—a thousand pearls, each better than the best that Pompey took from Mithridates and was too ungenerous to give to the Roman people!"

He smashed his fist into his palm at last and Cæsar blinked at him, smiling, moving a little to see past him and to signal to the tribune not to run in and protect him.

"WE ARE not electing a people's tribune, Tros! Sit down and calm yourself."

But Tros stood, knotting his fingers together behind his back to help him to subdue the violence of his emotion.

"Pride is it?" he asked. "You shall boast, if you will, you have conquered the Britons! You shall show those pearls in Rome in proof of it! The Vestal has my leave to give them to you when you turn away from Britain. It is the Britons and their homesteads I will save, and if you wish to say you conquered them, you have my leave—and I will add Caswallon's presently!"

"Where is he?" Cæsar asked, very abruptly. "I defeated him at the Thames, where he defended a ford with more skill than one might expect from a barbarian. Since then his army is divided into independent groups that harry my communications and I can not learn where he is."

"I doubt not he expects me. I have sent a man ashore who will find him and bid him meet me at a certain place," said Tros. "If I should go to him and say that Cæsar accepts that tribute of a thousand pearls in the name of the Roman people, and is willing to make peace and to withdraw his army, I am sure I can persuade Caswallon to permit the legions to embark unhindered. And for the rest—if you crave a few chariots to adorn your triumph, and a few promises not covered by security—perhaps even a brave man's oath of honor that he will not send assistance to the Gauls, I can arrange that. Otherwise—"

He paused, and for at least a minute each man looked into the other's eyes. Then—

"Otherwise?" asked Cæsar.

"I believe," said Tros, "that you will rue the day you entered Britain! It is easy to befoul your honor by one crook of your finger, that would doubtless bring a javelin into my back out of the darkness—"

"No," said Cæsar, "I have taken you entirely at your word. You may go as you came."

"Go you, also, as you came!" Tros answered. "For that man I set ashore has told the Britons how the matter stands in Gaul and Rome. Tomorrow's dawn will see that news go spreading through the forests—and away northward to the Iceni—and westward to a dozen other tribes. It will be a long war then, that your shipless legions will be forced to wage—if they will conquer Britain for you—while Gaul rises against Rome—and Rome gives Pompey the dictatorship!"

"I begin to suspect," said Cæsar, "that I underestimated your ability. How soon can you meet Caswallon?"

"I will take my ship around the coast and up the river, to the place where she was built, and see him there," Tros answered.

"Very well. Will you go to him, at last, as Cæsar's friend?"

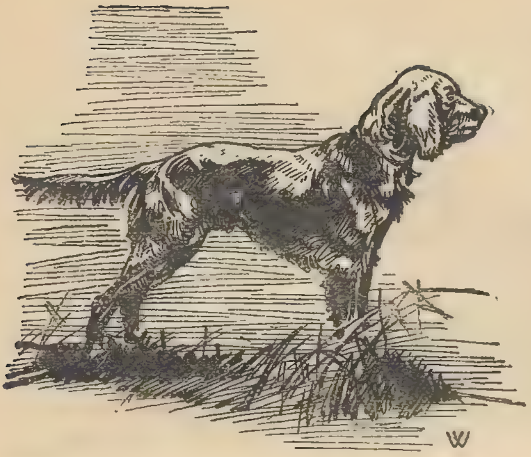
"Not I! Nor yet as Cæsar's enemy," said Tros. "I go as his friend. It is nothing to me what you do, or do not, to the world outside of Britain."

"There may come a day when I may badly need an admiral," said Cæsar.

"Aye, Pompey has the allegiance of the Roman fleet. But you shall struggle with him lacking my aid. What shape is the earth?" Tros asked.

"Some say square, some round," said Cæsar. "I would like to know."

"I, too, and I *will* know! I will sail around the world! My father, whom you tortured, prophesied that one day I should serve you. I have proved that vision true, though it was none of my wish. But he said, when I have served you I shall have my heart's desire. If I owned Rome and all her legions, Cæsar, I would leave them to whoever lusted for such trash, and sail away. I will have sailed around the world before you die in Rome of friendlessness and a broken heart!"



MONGRELS

By

James Parker Long

Author of "The Killer," "Home from the Wars," etc.

SANDY of the Harrington Kennels, that same active and highly attractive Irish setter who afterward became Champion Sandy Harrington, three times best dog at the Garden shows and two times winner of the Collingwood Trophy, which stamps its winner as the best working bird dog in America, had on one occasion succumbed to feminine charms outside his own select circle. The immediate result of his escape from the kennel yard and subsequent amorous adventures was a good stiff whipping from Alfy Muller, the trainer. The intermediate result was the existence of a litter of queer little beasties, half foxhound, half setter, only one of whom was permitted to live more than a day or two, and he only by the sheerest chance that the Harden boy did not have any other dog at the moment. His last had run so far with a can attached to its tail that it had failed to find its way home. The ultimate results are not yet come. What has happened will be told here.

One other event should be set out at this time as it had its bearing on the future of every one concerned. Young Emery Lyon had been hired away from his father's farm up in the Nettle Valley to help Alfy care for the Harrington dogs. He was a silent youth with no words for his fellow workers but with a love for his charges which amounted almost to a mania. The dogs loved him in return and none of the men bothered him. If he wanted to do more than his share of the work that was his business.

That is, no one bothered him except Alfy, his immediate boss. Alfy suffered from a severe attack of that "insolence of office" we read about, and he regarded Emery's self-respecting pride as surly insolence and thought that day lost in which he did not humble the silent lad in some way.

Just before Sandy's adventure—and thus we see that we are really at the starting point of the whole affair, because Sandy got out as a result of the inefficiency of Emery's successor, Alfy had saved his own job and deprived Emery of his by one act.

Alfy had seen the chance to do a neat stroke of business by substituting a grade bitch that he had picked up in the village for Champion Glenora Harrington who had been sold to a Western breeder. Emery had taken Glenora to the station, all nicely crated. Alfy had followed with the grade—and a mighty good looker she was—on a leash, and shifted the two after Emery had gone and while the express agent was out in front unloading egg cases. He had then resold Glenora and pocketed the proceeds. He had, therefore, been in a position, when the Western buyer arrived raring for blood, to swear that he had crated Glenora, herself, and had sent her to the station in charge of Emery.

The boy lost his job, naturally, but missed further punishment because they could not prove anything further and it did not seem to be his sort of deviltry. A week after his trial he surprized Alfy out in back of the kennels and trimmed him to a fare-thee-well.

"Mongrels," copyright, 1926, by James Parker Long.

Help arrived before he had quite killed him, but he had got to the point where he was sitting on him and pounding his head against the ground, so it was plain that his intentions were good.

This time they tried him for three sorts of qualified assault and made a case of it. His defense consisted of his unsupported story that Alfy had framed the preceding case against him and that he himself was the crook. This was laughed out of the court and Emery drew a year's sentence down the river. The only thing that he remembered out of the nightmare of the trial was the phrase, "sense of decency." The prosecuting attorney seemed to believe him lacking in it and repeatedly exclaimed—

"A man who is so lacking in sense of decency—" and all the rest of it.

All through his year Emery had it to chew on when he was wakeful and, to tell the truth, the boy did not sleep very well.

When he came home he quickly discovered that he had no neighbors. Apparently every one had decided that he was a bad one. He did not know then that under Alfy's guidance propaganda had been working overtime. Alfy had had other narrow escapes and he thought it well to have a goat. His father had died while he was away, and when he got out to the house he found that the glass had been broken out of the windows and what had not been stolen had been ruined by the weather.

He went downtown again to buy some necessities, and as he walked along Poplar Avenue between rows of houses, each of which had at least one open window framing silently staring eyes, he came to the Harden house and observed young Perry, the terror, attempting to educate a pup. And a most amazing pup it was! The mixture of hound and setter that was his ancestry had caused him to throw back to the primitive black and tan. Clumsy, tumbling, pestered baby that he was, his father's luxuriant feathering on legs and tail was already beginning to show and he raised a wrinkled hound face with pendent flews and smooth ears to howl in his mother's voice under the harsh hand of his master.

Perry's method of training was to shout at the top of his lungs that there might be no misunderstanding—

"Come here."

When the pup shrank back in dismay at the roar he would apply his gad and threaten—

"You better come, Dumb-head, or I'll tan you clean out of that hide."

Emery pulled the youngster off by the back of the neck and commanded him to go easy.

"I will not," howled Perry. "He's my dog. I'll lick him all I blame well please."

He wriggled loose, picked up a club and made a pass at the pup. The next instant he had been swung through the air, was face down across Emery's knee and was taking a man's sized spanking which he punctuated with howls of outraged wrath. The riot brought Ma Harden on the run, fat blobbing about like an excited seal.

"Lay offa him," she ordered. "Ya big stiff, ain't ya got no sense any decency at all? Pickin' on a wean thata way? Lay offa him or I'll crown ya, ya —— jail-bird."

"I'm through," announced Emery.

His jail-white face had grown whiter still at that phrase which had so haunted him. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a thin wallet, sorted out five dollars and dropped it into her hand.

"I'm taking the pup with me. Don't you try to make trouble for me or I'll have the law on you. You can't abuse animals nowadays, you know."

HE PICKED up the squirming, tongue-flashing bundle and strode away.

"Hey, Ma. I don't want him to have my dog. Make him give it back."

"Not a chance. Yer dad was a-goin' ter kill that dog pretty quick anyhow. We're five dollars ahead. I'd a tackled him for ten if it wasn't he looked so mean. He's a hard guy, that feller. I'll bet ya his spit'd bounce."

On his way home that night with his pack of bedding and food Emery sat under a hedge to rest and think things over. The pup sprawled over his feet for a few moments, growling and biting savagely at his laces. Then he sat up and sniffed. Emery watched him idly for a moment and then he, too, sat up, intensely interested. The spraddly little fellow was *flop-flopping* over the stubble toward a clump of weeds and brush around a stump, picking his feet absurdly high to clear the prickly straws.

Just before he reached the brush he stopped and froze, mongrel tail curled up over his back, hound head pointed straight ahead, one foot doubled clear up against his arm-pit in the position it had been in when motion ceased. The whole pose was so perfect a caricature of a pointing dog that Emery forgot his grouch and laughed till his eyes were wet. Then he slipped out of his pack and went up to the little tyke ordering—

"Whoa boy. Whoa."

Squatting beside him, he patted the tense little back and commanded, "Hie!", shoving him ahead at the same time to flush the covey of bob-whites which was hiding there.

"You little scut," exulted Emery. "You little scut! I wish I knew how you were bred, but it's plain that there is hunting blood there. I didn't know what I was going to do with you, I just took you to get you out of the hands of that little ——; but now I know. I'll keep you and I'll make you the greatest hunter that ever lived. A dog that can stand a covey at your age isn't found every day."

He picked him up and carried him over to the pack and as he went he thought—

"You've got to have a name. That's one sure thing. And it's got to be a decent name because you are all that I have."

He paused and then grinned. Rather a lop-sided grin it was, with more than a trace of cynicism.

"That's the answer," he decided. "I haven't much but, by gum, they can't say now that I have no sense of decency. You're christened, you little scut. Mind you live up to your name."

That fall when the trials for the Collingwood trophy were held over in Hickory Bottom, Emery was there, a shunned, deliberately overlooked spectator, and at his heels was "Deese." It had shortened to "Decency" and then to Deese as he had worked his way in to his master's heart, and now the half-grown dog and the man were as inseparable as this and that.

The dog was far enough developed so that he showed for what he was. His were the setter's body and instincts. His coat was long and no show setter ever flaunted prettier feathering. His markings were those of the Gordon setter, black—so black as to show purple tints in the sun—with tan feet, belly and chops, but the tan was almost a red. One who knew his breeding would have no trouble in seeing therein the glowing mahogany red of his father. From somewhere had come strongly arched and powerful loins which promised unusual strength and a depth of chest which testified to the quality of his vital organs.

But his face and head, too big for the body, drooping flews, red haw blazing, was the face of some ancestor of his mother's not far removed from the bloodhound. An object of scorn, that head made him to the casual observer, but not to Emery. He knew that in those large, moist nostrils was the hound's power of following the foot slot, hot or cold, joined uncannily to the setter's gift of picking up the body scent and following it, head high.

Together the silent man and the silent dog watched the trials, watched Sandy qualify with professional ease, watched him take out the other qualifiers one by one and outclass them at every point in the game; ranging, picking up scattered singletons, trailing wing-tipped runners, retrieving. Everything that a dog should be he was, and for the second time Alfy carried home the trophy to fat Jem Harrington and pocketed the cash as was their agreement.

As they stood on the hill and watched the final covey flushed and saw Sandy stand like a statue while his last opponent broke his point to chase a wounded bird, Emery dropped a hand on the pup's head and asked—"

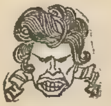
"Can you beat him, Deese?"

The mongrel's tail flapped gaily in promise.

"All right, old man, you will have your chance."

Then the two went back up to the weedy little farm.

When the time for the trials came round another year Deese was a grown dog and the local people who had seen him work and the city men whom Emery had guided up over Swindler's Gap to search for the ruffed grouse in the gulleys had awed tales to tell of his staunchness, his endurance, his uncanny nose for birds and the perfect understanding between dog and master.



ALFY heard of this, naturally. In our country dogs are talked of as blood horses are a main topic about Lexington, and yachts on the Sound. He heard about it and pooh-poohed but could not forget.

He had seen Emery work with dogs. He knew as well as any dog-man that the best dogs are those which are most with men and he knew that Emery had almost no one to talk with but the big mongrel. If he had had an unatrophied conscience it would have squirmed at this point because he knew, better than any one else, how much he was to blame for the boy's ostracism. As a matter of fact, he devoted considerable time to thinking about the chance that Sandy might be beaten.

He couldn't get away from it. When he worked his way up into the garret where the local sports met nightly to play poker and turn over their surplus cash to the greasily soft-spoken proprietor, he was confronted by the possibility.

"They tell me there is a mongrel up in Nettle Valley that is going to trim that dog of yours."

"Like ——!"

"I hope not for your sake. I have let that five hundred that you owe me go, in expectation of getting a cut in on that prize. If you should happen to lose out it wouldn't be very pleasant for you."

On his way home Alfy wondered—

"Do you suppose that thing can beat Sandy?" He took the thought to bed with him and lost sleep for two nights.

Then he sneaked up into the Gap where he knew that Emery had a party of hunters and saw them come in from a long day on the shaley hillsides where the ledges would have cut an ordinary dog's feet to slivers. He saw Deese dancing home as springy and free as when he started; saw him catch a faint odor and lead the way across three overgrown fields to an old cock-pheasant in a buckwheat stubble; saw the bird knocked over by an over-eager hunter and saw him disappear across a patch of dry leaves which the wind was tumbling about till it seemed that the leaves on which the scent lay must have been scattered over acres of woodland. Then, in amazement, he saw the hound head drop and snuffing, snuffing something, follow that wind-whirled trail to where the bird hid in a brush pile; dig it out and bring it back, feathers unmussed, to the hunter.

Then he went home and stayed awake some more.

A couple of weeks before the trials Harrington came out, announcing that he had let business go soak. He was going to play with the dogs and see that competition.

"I have money up with every man in the club that Sandy will win the third leg and the cup," he chortled. "The fools even gave me odds. Just because it never has been done they think it can't be done. It's a shame to take the money."

Alfy grinned weakly and squirmed daily as he saw him increasing his wagers. Of course, the old man had money to throw away if he wanted to, but everybody hates to lose. He was in strong with him now because he had trained a winner for him and was turning in lots of money from the kennels. A breeder could ask anything he wanted for a service or a pup from the winner of the Collingwood Cup. But where would he be if he lost? There were certain irregularities to explain which he had put off till after the trials.

There was a certain lady of the theatrical profession who had moved to the village lately. Her tastes were very expensive and she was very exacting that they be satisfied to the limit. Some of the ways he had procured the money might make trouble for him unless he could win and use the prize money to make restitution. It was more than lucky for him that the purse for the three time winner was five thousand instead of the annual five hundred.

Two or three days before the opening of the trials a stranger, red faced, with quivering jaw and with clenched fists, arrived. It was one Webster, from York State, who had paid five hundred dollars for a pedigreed bitch in whelp to Sandy. Alfy had gone on the market, found a cheap but fairly good one with no pedigree, manufactured the pedigree and sold her. She was bred to Sandy all right but her own mixed ancestry showed up in the litter and spilled the beans.

Alfy had forgotten all about the deal. He had so many of the sort now that occasionally one slipped his mind. But wasn't it the hardest kind of luck to have it crop up at this time? And he had to make good, with several hundred over to shut the man's mouth, or it would come to Harrington's attention.

"All right," agreed Webster. "I'll stick around till after the trials. But if you don't come across then, I'll jug the gang of you and have you fired from the Kennel Club."

That night Alfy fixed up a chunk of round steak that would slip down as easy as a frog into a puddle and parked a teaspoonful of arsenic in the center of it. It was easy to toss it into the Lyon yard as he drove past in a car but it was another thing to make Deese eat it. He never had eaten anything except what Emery gave him and so with a howl or two after the retiring car he lay on the porch and wondered what was the matter with the cat which came along later in the night, started to eat the meat, had a fit and died with great suddenness.

Emery found the cat and the meat and put two and two together. Alfy had had a good sleep that night which was lucky, because the next morning Emery, with Deese at heel, came to the kennels and shook an irate fist under his nose.

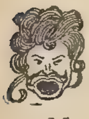
"—— you," he sputtered, "if I could prove that you tried that I'd break every bone in your cowardly hide. And if anything does happen to Deese I'll do it anyway."

He whirled on his heel and walked away from Alfy and the interested circle of observers while Alfy's trembling knees let him down and he tried three times to light a cigar.

That night Alfy got an idea and with his witnesses he went before the county judge and asked to have Emery shut up as a menace to his peace of mind. The judge, who was also one of the judges of the trials and liked a good dog himself, heard his story of the making of the threats but refused to permit any action. At the same time he added a word of caution.

"The lad is all keyed up and it is no wonder. It would be most unfortunate if anything should happen to his dog," he said; "not only for what he might do but also because I should feel obligated to devote all my energies to finding out the truth of the matter, and should be real harsh should it develop that any one who might profit was at the bottom of it."

Things quieted down then until the day before the trials were to begin. Then Deese turned up missing. Alfy proved a watertight alibi and stayed indoors.



EMERY raged around and made all sorts of wild talk about killing until the judge called him before him, assured him that the law would turn things inside out till the dog was found and had him given a sedative to calm him down.

He ended up his talk:

"But mind you, dog or no dog, you have no right to assault anybody. If you ever learned that Alfy had injured your dog as you claim and attacked him in any way except through process of law I should personally see to it that you were punished."

He then summoned Alfy and told him that the will of Mr. Collingwood which established the prizes gave extraordinary power to the judges. They were within their rights in such a case in witholding the award to the winner till Deese was found and given his chance to compete. Furthermore, the implication of any competing handler would not only void a prize award but would bar him forever from the contests.

The next morning Deese came home—from somewhere. His loss and return are among our unsolved mysteries—but we guess.

The competition began promptly and according to schedule the judges, working singly, took out a single dog at a time; watched him find a bird; saw him retrieve it, and on that showing, but mainly on preknowledge—we know dogs in our country—weeded down the field to the thirty-two best.

The second day the dogs were worked in fours and given three hours in the field. Certain defects and faults instantly disqualified, and those which were left were sorted over on a point system by the judges and brought down to the best eight. From then on it was dog against dog in round-robin competition.

The third morning Blaze developed a slight gun-shyness. Dally, the springer, proved slow and was beaten by four in succession. Chet went lame, and Empress who had been staunch on partridge and quail, went to pieces on pheasants. The whole afternoon failed to weed out another one. There had been nothing brilliant. There was no chance for anything unusual. Conditions were perfect, birds plentiful and the dogs went through their duties like machines.

That night Alfy had visitors who left him flushed and angry, but quavery too. In search of a loop-hole he read all the literature that he could find which bore on the contest and in the morning protested Deese. The purpose of the award was stated by Collingwood to be— "that it might be determined what breed of dogs is best—" Alfy maintained with some truth that Deese belonged to no breed. Emery was restrained by force till the judges could act. They decided that if the competition should prove that mongrels were best it would be serving the purpose as well as any other way and permitted Deese to take the field.

That morning was hot and dry and scent neither lay nor carried well. Macauley's Blondy, the big pointer dog who had showed up so well in the stubble the day before, proved too fast in the thorn apples, and the steadier Deese, following him, found four birds in his very tracks. He was then given a chance with Sandy, and before they had been together fifteen minutes Sandy found a bird that he had passed. At almost the same time the heavy bodied, short legged clumber, Jeunesse, who had outclassed the field on cock and snipe, began to wilt under the intense heat and dryness and was ruled out.

It was about this time that old Judge Benton got down to his undershirt and Alfy began to miss birds.

An attempt was made to pick a difference between Sandy and the mongrel on training. They were put through all their trick stuff; called off from hot trails and put on cold ones; sent to specified clumps by word of mouth and later by gesture; turned right and left; backed and halted in full run, on command; asked to follow a cold bird track across a path made by dragging a freshly killed and bleeding rabbit.

Sandy flashed about the field like a living flame, ears cocked for the slightest whistle, eyes dancing with interest and keen for any motion. Alfy was a wreck. His nerves were twitching and he was making hard work of it for his dog by his many misses and cripples.

Deese loped about without a single waste motion. Emery's birds were killed clean and dropped dead, most of them in the open, and that amazing sympathy between the two was never better shown than at this time when commands flashed between the two that none could see or hear.

The judge called his colleagues together and summed it up.

"There is nothing to choose mentally or in training between the two," he said. "Sandy is slightly faster but as thorough. Deese can find birds at a greater distance. It is a stand off. However, we have to pick one dog and all that we have left is physical strength and endurance. We have half a day left. Let's send them right through this afternoon, heat or no heat, give them no chance to rest and pick the dog that stands up under it best."

When they agreed he said—

"All right then, but for Pete's sake, get me a horse. Another hour of this would kill me."

WHEN they struck out for the afternoon grind there were three among the gallery who watched Alfy with meaning eyes. He observed them with a cringe. He was licked and he knew it. Sandy was a great dog but he was past his prime and was showing signs of fatigue already. The dog he was facing was as perfect a hunter and not yet come to his strength. Only a miracle could keep the younger dog from winning. If he did win, Alfy would be in a hole that he hated to think about.

Sandy stood the first bird, and at Alfy's command flushed it. The handler's faltering fingers exploded the gun prematurely and the shot and wads hurtled not a foot over Sandy's head. The gallant dog never flinched, but swung his head slowly and moved a step or two after another skulker. Alfy went pale as he realized what had almost happened, and then he apparently saw a light. The incident had shown him a way out.

Now we are at one of those debated points that we have never cleared up. Whether Alfy planned to shoot close to Deese's ears to startle him off a point and his nerves betrayed him or whether he deliberately shot to kill no one will ever know. It seems as if it must have been the first because no man in his senses would have tried to kill his opponent's dog so openly. But there are some who say that Alfy had worried so that he was no longer in his senses.

Be that as it may, not ten minutes later, on the very next bird, while the two dogs were standing together; Deese, his ugly mismatched head and clean limbs tense as a string, almost on to a quail and Sandy, an ideal of canine beauty, backing him, Emery ordered the bird flushed and before he was well off the ground Alfy's gun roared—both barrels. Deese, the back of his head a mass of blood, fell to the ground, outstretched legs twitching. Before Emery reached him he was still.

Emery stooped over him a moment, soothing the silky side. Then he stood up and looked for Alfy. He said no word. There was no need. Grief and hate mingled on his face to spell murder as plain as print. Alfy read his fate in one swift glance—we all did—and, throwing his useless gun away, he leaped the hedge and started for the shelter of the swamp running like a greyhound.

Emery swung his gun into position as coolly as if he were going to fire at another bird, paused a moment for a good view through a hedge gap and fired both barrels. There was no need to go to his victim. No man in whom life was could have gone down so utterly limply.

Emery watched a moment, automatically opening his gun and slipping in new shells. Then he turned to his dog, gathered the relaxed figure in his arms, head, legs and tail hanging down at grotesque angles and started to stagger back the road he had come. Before he had taken a dozen steps the gallery had come up and old Dr. Spence, the best dog doctor in five States, had him by the shoulder and was taking the heavy dog.

When it was on the ground with the old man examining it, Emery swept his sleeve across his face and muttered:

"He had it coming. He asked for it." As if the words woke him from a trance he looked about him.

The judge stood there, a world of sympathy in his heart but with set jaw and firm lips. Emery remembered his words spoken as if foreseeing this very situation, he knew his standing with the town folk, he remembered his threats—and here came the sheriff. He had tarried to smoke a pipe under some oak shade but now he was pantingly making up for lost time.

His natural thought was of escape but as he turned to go the judge halted him.

"I wouldn't run. It will be better for you if you face it."

Emery paused a moment to snarl:

"What do you think I am a —— fool? If they sent me up for a year just for slapping him a few times they would electrocute me for shooting him."

An instant later he had caught up his gun and was running lightly up over the field toward the woods. No one thought of following him. It had all happened so suddenly that they were half stunned and gathered about the shattered body of the trainer in a murmuring group.

"He was a good servant," muttered his employer, Harrington, in a tone that sounded almost as if he were pitying himself.

"He was, like ——," spat Webster. "He was stealing you blind every minute." He went on to relate his experiences.

That untied tongues and the others tore at his reputation like vultures at a body till by the time the sheriff panted up it was stripped to the bone.

"I deputize you all to help me catch him," he shouted. "Hold up your right hands."

An instant later he had pattered off an oath and was barking hurried orders.

"You and you and you, hustle up to Johnson's on the ridge and get him to bring his hound. He'll follow a trail, some. And you, Jerry, and you and you, get guns and get down on the bridges, one to each. He will have to get over onto the other side to get away. And you, get on a phone and get the troopers and notify Middleboro and Jenkins and the other towns to be on the watch. Jake, you and Hal get up to his house and don't let him get any food or money or anything. The rest of you beat these woods. Hurry now, he's got a big lead."

Just then the Doc's voice called—

"You know, boys, it sounds funny, but I don't think this dog is even badly hurt. The charge must have almost missed. The bone isn't injured and he isn't bleeding badly. I have stopped the two big blood vessels that were cut."

No attention was paid to him. A man hunt, the most thrilling thing there is, was on and, alive or dead, no one cared about poor Deese.

Half an hour later, when the men who went for the hound had come back without him—he was away on business of his own—Deese was on his feet, shaky but already looking inquiringly about for his master. When he failed to see him he dropped his nose, circled a few times and then moved unerringly up across the field in his track.

"Go with him, boys," ordered the sheriff. "I have a hunch that I know where Emery will try and cross the river. Mr. Harrington and I will go and watch there. You will find me by that white rock just south of the gully-mouth. If you don't want to go home, Judge, why don't you come along. It will be a good place to sit and talk it over."

Harrington looked bothered.

"Mean to hunt a man down with his own dog."

"I should worry. It's my job to get him and I don't care how I do it."

Already the dog was in the woods and so the three moved off, over toward the river.

That afternoon established Deese's reputation. They still tell how he solved all the puzzles left behind by Emery to head off any possible trailer; how he followed the Rock Stream on one bank, head high, and turned across and picked up the trail where Emery had left the water without a single false cast; how he took the track of Wilson's old mare that Emery had mounted in her pasture and followed it to the tree where Emery had left her by an overhanging limb; how he made a single circle and picked up the track on a stone fence and ran it to a flock of sheep who should have stamped it out, but hadn't; how he followed it through their greasy stench to the river road.

The full story of that afternoon would make a book—but no matter. It was the end that counted, and that was seen.

Perched behind the big white rock, the sheriff, the judge and Harrington commanded the river road and the one spot where the river could be forded by a poor swimmer. The mouth of the gully, down which the canny old sheriff thought Emery would make his way, was just beyond them. Over beyond that was the fertile bottom with its tangle of automobile roads and trolley and steam-train tracks. A man who could slip over there under cover of the night would be hard to catch. The trail might lead almost anywhere.

IT WAS growing dusk, the judge had made a move to go and the sheriff was just saying— "No, stick it out. It won't be long now." When Emery stepped out of the rocky tangle of river-bank upstream and, walking boldly into the middle of the road that no watcher might see signs of stealth, had passed the three silent men before they recognized the fugitive in his assured figure. He turned as confidently into the mouth of the gully and wriggled into a patch of young hemlocks which hid him from the road but left him exposed to the watchers.

"Are you going to take him now?" whispered Harrington, quivering with excitement.

"Not till the boys with the dog get here. He surprized me so, popping out where he did, that he got past before I was ready and where he is now he could get up into the gully and get away before I could stop him. Then we would have it all to do over again. I don't want to have to shoot the boy."

Ten minutes more they lay in silence and then Deese jumped from the bank where Emery had appeared. He was straining with eagerness against the leash and the three deputies were right on his tail. The instant the big black-and-tan mongrel appeared, the hemlocks stirred convulsively and Emery was staring, whitefaced, coming into plain view. The dog was half way to him before he moved, before he even seemed to breathe. Then he looked behind him up the glen and shrugged as if to say—

"What's the use?"

And, indeed, there was no use. With that dog behind him, leaping eagerly forward to greet his loved master, he would be run down before the moon was up.

Shooting would relieve him of that menace. Hard-faced, but with trembling hands, he raised the gun and waited till that loved head should appear in the mouth of the gully. When he did catch it over the midrib he uttered one short, wordless curse, hurled the gun from him and sank on the hemlock needles, his head in his hands.

In a moment the dog was leaping ecstatically against him and raining enthusiastic, drippy kisses on his cheek and ear.

"You will have to go with us," ordered Jake.

Deese sensed something baneful to his master in the tone, and whirled with bared teeth.

"No, Deese, no. He is right. But there are worse things than that."

THE little party moved out into the road and met the three who had watched. Harrington caught at Emery's hand and pumped it wordlessly. Then he whirled on the judge.

"Can I give bail for this man?"

"I don't see why not. I don't call it a first degree matter."

"Then, son, I'll go your bail and I'd like to hire you to tend my dogs. I thought I had the top dog-man, but I have learned better. Love for the dogs is half the game, and you showed how you stood on that."

"But—"

"Sure you will have to serve time, but

you will have the best lawyer I can hire to see that you aren't gypped, and the judge is wishing right now that he did not have to send you up, so he'll watch, too. Don't you fret about that, boy. And when you do get out, there will be your job right where you left it. Will you come to me?"

Emery did not answer, but he had sunk down and thrown his arms around his dog's neck and was assuring him—

"You did right, pup. You did what was right."

PEMMICAN AND BLACK DRINK

by F. W. Hodge

WHAT the Indians, as well as some of our explorers, in the northern countries would have done without pemmican, one can not well imagine, for its nutritious and lasting properties in the cold country and the fact that it can be packed in small compass and thus made easy of transportation when every ounce of weight is a problem, makes pemmican so valuable as a food that the aboriginal inventor of it deserves a monument. Nowadays, it seems, one may purchase the fancy product from certain outfitters, put up in accordance with sanitary methods, but the Indians and many a white *voyageur* have thrived on their own rather meager supply while on the trail, when no other food was obtainable.

The meat used in pemmican is of various kinds, depending on availability—reindeer, buffalo, deer or what not. It is cut in thin strips and dried in the sun, much as other meat is jerked, or in the smoke of a slow fire; then it is pounded fine between stones, and mixed with about a third as much melted fat. To this mixture is sometimes added such dried wild fruit as is procurable, like chokecherries or Juneberries; then the mess is compressed into skin bags, and if kept dry will last for as long as four or five years. A kind known as sweet pemmican was made with marrow instead of ordinary fat, the marrow being obtained by breaking the bones and boiling them in water. Some of the Indians of the Northwest made pemmican with pounded dry fish and sturgeon oil, which does not sound like an especially savory dish. But less tasty still is a pemmican that the Eskimo make with chewed venison mixed with deer-suet and seal-oil, which, says one explorer, "is not agreeable to the taste, probably owing to the fact that the masticators are inveterate tobacco-chewers."

The term pemmican, derived from the Algonkian group of languages, signifies "manufactured grease."

BEFORE the Southern tribes were removed to the territory that since has become Oklahoma, some of them, notably the Creeks and Seminole, practised the custom of using in certain ceremonies the so-called "black drink," a decoction, known also as "Carolina tea," made by boiling the leaves of *Ilex cassine* in water, which, being black, was given its popular name by British traders. The use of the drink, like that of many other Indian forms of medicine, was for the purpose of purification, and it was a powerful agent in producing "spiritual power," for which reason a draft was often taken before council in order to induce a proper state of mind—to sharpen the wits, an effect which it no doubt had because of the caffeine that it contained.

The drink was always an important accompaniment of the "busk," the annual green-corn thanksgiving. In some of the Creek and Seminole rites there was a personage known as "*yahôlo*"—the hallooer—the office of whom, at one time, was held by the celebrated Seminole chief and warrior Osceola. His name was given him for that reason, *assi*—the black drink—plus *yahôlo*, whence Assiyaholo, corrupted by the whites to Osceola, the "black-drink hallooer." The Creek chief Opothleyoholo, of equal renown in his tribe, derived his name in much the same way. It was really an initiation title and means "child hallooer."

ZE BABY MOONGKEY

by Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "Frog," "Old Sails," etc.

“FROGGY” LAPORTE had lots to be glad about—for a ship's cook in the American Navy. He had a shore job, was cook at the radio station on the Island of Guam—and this duty was "duck soup" for Froggy, who for nine years had been preparing chow for all the way up to a thousand bluejackets at a time. Moreover, he had a cozily furnished little bungalow with a fine big yard all around in which were flowers, coconut trees, chickens, a sow pig with seven sucklings, a billy-goat and a French poodle. But best of all Froggy had Marie, his wife.

Marie was nineteen; small and slender and soft, with the grace of a fawn and the fluttering buoyancy of a dove; with a face that needed neither powder nor paint nor fan to smile behind. Her eyes were as black as Froggy's and as full of French fire. So too was her raven-black hair a dead match for Froggy's hair, mustache and tiny goatee. She was a very lovely little frog, and Froggy was not a little proud of her.

Evenings, when the Marine band was playing on the plaza in Agana, Guam's capital, Froggy used to take Marie out and parade her around the band stand before the coveteous and envious eyes of officialdom—Naval and Marine officers and their wives. Those were keen moments for Froggy.

There's no telling what will happen. It was during one of those evenings. The plaza was crowded with natives and whites; gold-braided and gold-buttoned white uniforms and soft, clinging gowns were everywhere; perfume, music, laughter and silken rustlings filled the cool night air. Froggy and Marie had made about the twentieth lap in their promenade round the band stand, when suddenly a shrill, child-like screech cut the air, and—as if it had fallen from the heavens—Marie had a little monkey in her arms!

Of course God doesn't send monkeys here in that way. Monk had simply jumped from the arms of a passer-by into Marie's.

"Oo-oo-oo! *La la la!*" cried she. "Look Franceese! Ze baby moongkey!"

But a huge, gnarled hand already had monk by the scruff and was pulling him away.

"Say, you Meester Beeg Steef!" protested Marie, whose stock of English words consisted mostly of gob slang, she being not long from France. "Take ze paws off ze baby moongkey! Franceese," to Froggy, "knock heem for ze row of chicking coop!"

"Let 'er have him a minute, mister," Froggy spoke up. "She likes monkeys."

"So I see," grinned Mr. Big Stiff, withdrawing his huge paw.

He added, looking Froggy up and down—"Specially the kind with black mustaches and goatees, eh."

Froggy let that pass. Not that he was a coward. He had common sense. The man had the look of a tough proposition. He was about forty, of medium height and broad and powerful in the chest and shoulders. His face was red and booze-bloated and half covered with sandy whiskers; the nose looked like an English walnut dyed red, and the eyes were fierce and watery—some old sea dog, by the dirty white cap and coat he wore.

Marie continued to fondle and coo over the monkey in good French and bad English. Froggy looked on grinning, twisting his waxed mustache to finer points. Mr. Big Stiff's fierce eyes goggled up and down over Marie's dress of lavender silk. No one was paying them any attention; the band was playing a lively air, and the throng was drifting along, round and round, laughing, humming, scandal hatching.

"Well say," growled Red Nose at length, "gonna slobber over that animal all night?"

"Oo-oo-oo, Meester Beeg Steef," wheedled Marie, "you have ze heart. I luff ze baby moongkey."

"Well I'll be ——," Red Nose grumbled. Then to Froggy, "Say, I ain't got all night! I'm headin' back to my ship. Gettin' under way at daylight."

Which conveyed to Froggy the intelligence that Red Nose must be the captain of the little schooner *Millie Miller*—she being the only ship in Apra Harbor at the time. Introductions were in order, thought Froggy, and extended his hand.

"Laporte's my name. This is my wife."

"Both frogs, eh," the other observed, ignoring the hand. "Rodrick's mine. Captain Rodrick, if you wanna be polite."

The name established another connection. It brought back to Froggy little dribblings of chow-table talk up at the radio station some days before. Two of the radio lads, in Agana for a day's frolic, had drifted into one of those transient barroom intimacies with this fellow Rodrick. And he'd had a pearl, a large beautiful pearl, which he wanted them to "peddle" for him among the Naval and Marine officers, without divulging its ownership—say they had gotten it from some native.

"I'll take that monkey," Rodrick added.

But it was love at sight between Marie and Monk, and she made no move to hand him over.

"Tell you, skipper," said Froggy, drawing forth his roll, "I'll buy that monkey; give you anything within reason for him."

With Rodrick's back to the band lights and the vizor of his cap down low, Froggy couldn't see the wolfish gleam in those red and watery eyes as they gloated over Marie's soft and harmonious lines.

"Tell you—" Rodrick hesitated, scratching his rum-blossom.

He spat out a gill or so of tobacco juice; then in an almost friendly tone:

"Much as I'd like to get rid of the —— pest I couldn't sell you the monkey, myself. He belongs to one of my crew—little Kanaka."

He glared hard at Froggy a moment.

"If youse wanna run down to Piti with me and come aboard, the Kanaka might talk turkey."

"I'll go you." Froggy snapped his fingers. "I'll leave Marie home."

"I said 'youse'."

Froggy shot him a glare.

"What, take Marie, all dressed up like she is, out aboard your lousy tub?"

"Gi'me the monkey!"

"Wait a minute, mister! Don't get excited. Why can't I go aboard alone with you?"

" 'Cause it wouldn't do you any good. The Kanaka that owns him wouldn't sell him—to you. He might to your wife."

Froggy and Marie now engaged in a rapid-fire exchange of French.

"All right, skipper," said Froggy finally. "If you think the owner of the monkey 'll sell him to my wife, we'll go aboard with you."

"I ain't sayin' he will," Rodrick growled. "He might. All I can tell you is that he's a —— of a boob—flops like a ton of cheese when a good lookin' white woman giggles at him. You'se can come back with me, just like you're two friends o' mine aboard for a drink and a look over the ship—and the chances are your wife can make the Kanack talk turk."

"Come on," said Froggy, and he and Marie led the way off the plaza over toward the marine barracks. "I'll telephone for a car."

THEN followed a ten-mile ride, to Piti, the harbor port, over a narrow, sinuous road that wound to the north along a low, sandy beach at times, and at others plunged inland through dark and dense coconut groves where the overhead foliage obscured the sky, or through a cluster of bamboo shacks and hovels, where dogs yapped after them and pigs squealed and goats bleated.

Marie and the monkey did all the talking. Leisurely and serenely Froggy twisted his mustache and took in the scenery. Rodrick, on the front seat with the native chauffeur, took several drinks from a bottle.

"Frog, we sure ought to have a Ford," observed Froggy, as they drew in to the outskirts of Piti. "You could take me up to the radio station every mornin', and come and get me in the evenings."

"*Bavardage!* Keep quiet ze bazoo! You wake ze baby moongkey!"

The car stopped at the boat landing in Piti. Froggy told the native chauffeur to wait for them. He attached no significance to Rodrick's chuckle at the moment.

The *Millie Miller's* long-boat, with two Kanaka seamen in it, awaited the skipper at the wharf. Rodrick took the tiller, Froggy and Marie sat on an after thwart, and the boat shoved off.

It was dark; no moon, no stars. Two clusters of lights—those of Sumay, a town across the bay, and the *Millie Miller's* anchor lights—were all that broke the blackness of Apra Harbor. And save for the grunts of the Kanakas at the oars, the creak of the row-locks and the swish of the water, they made the two miles out to the schooner in silence.

Rodrick hailed, as they drew alongside. In response a dark form appeared above the schooner's bulwarks. At a few growled words, in some south-sea tongue or other, the two dusky seamen boated their oars; then one jumped up in the bow and threw the painter up to the man on deck, while the other stepped aft and stood by to pull in the boat's stern end.

They clambered up a rope ladder that hung down over the ship's side, Rodrick first, then Froggy, pulling Marie and the monkey after him.

"Look out you'se don't break your necks," cautioned Rodrick, leading them aft along the dark deck. "Loose gear layin' around."

"Ain't you got any lights, skipper?" queried Froggy.

"Only oil," Rodrick answered, halting at the door of a hatchhood, which Froggy thought must open down into the cabin. "Wait here a few seconds," he added, and then staggered away forward.

"Say, kid," Froggy whispered, "that bird's half canned."

"*Oui oui.* We are ze two bonehead. We should come in ze daytime!"

Froggy's toes, too, were commencing to feel a touch of frost-bite. There was evil in the air. Somehow he had the feeling of walking into a trap.

And that chill in his toes moved up to his knees, as Rodrick's short, gruff-toned commands issued back out of the darkness forward, where shadowy forms now moved about like so many imps of evil. Something was wrong, rotten. This ship was a nest of treachery. The wind in the rigging aloft seemed fraught with ominous portend; there was a mockery in it that made Froggy weak at the stomach. However, he couldn't betray such feelings to Marie. He had his feet wet now, and must bluff it through. He sniffed and snapped his fingers.

"Aw, me eye. You want the monkey, don't you?"

"*Oui oui.* But I teenk we are ze two bonehead."

Then Rodrick returned aft, carrying a lantern.

"All right, you two kids, come on," he growled, and, unlocking the door of the hatch hood, led them down a steep companionway.

"Just a second, till I light some more lamps," he said at the bottom.

RODRICK'S cabin was about twelve feet wide, the breadth of the ship's after section, and perhaps a little deeper than that fore and aft. In the forward bulkhead, one on each side at the foot of the companionway, were two doors. Pictures of sailing ships hung along both sides between portholes. Aft, in the starboard corner was a large chart-desk, littered with papers and nautical instruments; cater-cornered on the other side was a high buffet, on which were bottles bearing labels of brands various, and glasses. Easy chairs stood about, and in the middle was a large square table.

They sat there in the dim glow of three overhead lamps, Marie talking in French to the monkey in her lap, who looked up at her with creased brow and eyes wide and plaintive; Froggy twisting the glistening waxed ends of his mustache, his sharp-featured face as white as his uniform, but the fire of a wide-awake intellect gleaming in his black eyes. Rodrick sat across the table from them, grinning through his tobacco-stained teeth and shaggy yellow whiskers, his blotchy, bulbous nose and watery eyes giving him the look of a cat. He was red with rum and growing redder. He had gulped two glasses from the bottle at his elbow and was now pouring the third.

"You're a —— of a sailor, don't drink," he growled at Froggy, and tossed it off.

"Never did drink booze," Froggy replied. "Only wine."

"That's the frog of it," Rodrick grunted, then turned to expectorate in a bucket at his feet, simultaneously pushing back from the table.

He rocked a little, as he stood up, but steadied himself.

"I got some wine," he said, striding aft to the buffet.

"Never mind it, skipper," Froggy hastened to decline. "I—we're off the stuff. Just get us the guy that owns the monkey, and let's see what we can do. You see, I have to get up early in the morning and get up to the radio station. I'm cook up there."

Rodrick turned, his back to the buffet. "Oh, you belong to that outfit?" He grinned. "I was with a couple o' them kids the other night. Sent 'em both home slopped up." He paused a moment, and then added, "Did they spit their guts up?"

"Oh—not much," Froggy answered. "Said you were pretty wet. Something about a pearl."

Rodrick scowled. He turned his back to them and began filling two glasses. Then unlocking and pulling out a small drawer, he took from it a leather wallet. Returning to the table he set the two glasses before Froggy and Marie.

Froggy flashed Marie a black-eyed "don't," and received a black-eyed acknowledgment.

Rodrick resumed his seat and with his big knotty fingers began removing the thick elastic band from round the wallet.

"You hear lots about pearls these days," he growled. "They write stories about 'em bein' big as baseballs. The —— liars ought to be made swallow baseballs! Take a look at that one."

He let it fall from the wallet—a perfect sphere, three-quarters of an inch in diameter, pure white with an iridescent tingeing of pink and blue, and of unsurpassable luster. It came rolling slowly over toward them.

Froggy sat up and snapped his fingers; Marie said "Oo-oo-oo!" and reached for the pearl. But the monkey beat her to it. With a scream of delight, like a child finding a lost toy, the monk sprang up out of Marie's lap, cleared the glass of wine before her and pounced upon and scooped up the tiny ball of magnificence in his tiny hands; then he sat back on his haunches in the center of the table, turning it over and over, grinning, chattering, gloating over it.

They sat watching him for a few minutes. Finally Marie reached out.

"Give to ze mamma ze pearl," she coaxed.

Monk refused. And when she tried to snatch it from him he let out a screech, stuffed the pearl in his jowls, leaped from the table like a grasshopper and disappeared into one of the dark corners of the cabin.

"Well?" Rodrick glared at Froggy. "What do yuh think o' that marble?" His bearded lips curled back in a snarl as he added, "You're wonderin' where I stole it, eh?"

Froggy grinned. "No. None of my business where you got it. But ain't you afraid the monk 'll lose it?"

"Not much. Least he ain't never lost it yet. I let him play with it once in a while. A kick in his chops and he'll spit it out again." He poured himself another half-tumbler of rum. "Why don't youse drink your wines?"

"Because we don't want 'em," Froggy answered.

"—— good reason," Rodrick grinned, and lifted his glass.

"Skipper—" Froggy's patience was petering out—"we don't care anything about your pearl, or where you got it, or anything. We only came out here to buy the monkey. If you're only kiddin' us—why, just say so and we'll scud back home with the joke on us."

"Youse will, eh?" With his right hand Rodrick scratched his red nose; then he put that right hand in his side coat pocket. "How? Swim?"

A long silence.

"Come to think of it, I better not sell youse that monkey," Rodrick said finally. "He's a valuable animal; trained to pickin' pockets."

FROGGY sat stiff, pale, but mentally very much alive. He didn't quite penetrate this old sea bum's game; but he had a hunch that the boozy, blotchy old vagabond had his red eye on Marie. Froggy was positive now that the glass of wine before him was drugged, or poisoned. Moreover, he was positive Rodrick held a gun in that pocket. He had a cutthroat to handle. But how?

Marie, sensing the drift, turned to her husband.

"We pull ze bonehead?"

Without taking his glittering black eyes off Rodrick, in French, Froggy answered—

"Keep your head, kid."

Rodrick returned his look for a full minute in silence. Then abruptly he reddened, and a maniacal light gleamed in his watery eyes. He thrust his head forward.

"Young feller, let me tell you somethin': I didn't steal that pearl! The reason I wanted them mates o' yourn to sell it on the q. t. was because I still owe for it. Savvy? I got that pearl from a rich chink in Shanghai—Li Hung Foo. And the agreement was, I ain't to sell it again till I pay for it."

"I see."

"You do like ——! I ain't paid for it yet. Get me? If I sell it before I pay for it—I'm to get a knife in the back."

"Better not sell it then."

"I was to pay for that pearl in six months," Rodrick ignored the suggestion. "Them six months is almost up. I got another month. Likewise if I don't pay for that pearl in that time—I get a knife in the back."

"Why don't you give the yellow-belly back his pearl?"

"Can't. That's in the agreement."

"Is it in the agreement about you gettin' a knife in the back?"

"That's understood—when you're dealin' with a chink, 'specially a rich one."

Rodrick paused a moment, then, jerking a thumb over his left shoulder, went on:

"I got a crew of seven Kanakas. Any one of 'em would cut a throat for a dollar and ten cents." He paused, glaring fiercely. "And one or more o' that gang's got orders to do said knifin', if, 's I say, I fail on said agreement. I'm bein' piked off every move I make. That's why I wanted them mates o' yourn to peddle the marble on the q. t."

Rodrick poured himself another drink. Froggy's color had returned, and he was again twisting his mustache. After all, the old sea bum didn't want his Marie. He snapped his fingers.

"I see."

"You do like ——! 'S I say, some nigger or two, forrid, is gonna knife me in the back, if I don't meet my agreement with Li Hung Foo on said date." Rodrick leaned over. "That date, young feller, is less than a month away. It's up to me to raise the price of that pearl in that time."

He swallowed the half-tumbler of rum.

"I got you, skipper," Froggy spoke up. "You want me to peddle the pearl."

Rodrick pushed back from the table and stood up. He was drunk now, but not blind drunk, nor thick-tongued drunk. He swayed a little, his face was a fiery red and he was breathing hard; but in his bleary eyes shone the light of a mad and deep-rooted purpose. His right hand was still in his coat pocket.

"Peddle ——," he growled, as he backed away forward toward the companionway. "That wouldn't let me out. First place I ain't to pay for the pearl in cash." He caught himself. "'T's all right," he grinned. "Drink your wines, kids, while I go get the monkey that owns the Kanaka—I mean the Kanaka that owns the monkey. Tongue's twisted."

He halted at the foot of the companionway, rocking drunkenly, his bleary eyes on Marie.

"Some skirt you got there, young feller."

He had said enough to awaken Froggy to action. But, quick as Froggy was getting up and around that table, Rodrick's right hand was three times as quick coming out of that pocket. Froggy halted, facing a long-barreled pistol.

"Steady, young feller."

"Where do you get that stuff!"

"I don't get it. I got it."

"What's the idea?"

Rodrick grinned.

"Say, you're bright as ——, ain't you. No wonder the American Navy cleaned the submarines out o' the seas—with the likes o' you in it."

He backed up the companionway.

"Sit down, young feller. Make yourselves at home. Drink your wines. Everything's all right. Be right back."

He backed through the door leading out

on deck and slammed it shut. A metallic click told them it was locked.

FROGGY dashed up the companionway and threw his weight against the door. No use. He came back down.

"Kid," he said solemnly, "we're two frogs in a hole."

They looked at each other in white-faced silence. There was no way out. A cat or a monkey might have crawled through one of the portholes.

"Two bonehead!" Marie corrected.

In a few minutes, through the open portholes came the noise of a gasoline engine. The deck vibrated slightly.

"Ze boat come?"

"Boat nothin'!" Froggy stepped over to the port side and peered out. "That's her auxiliary engine you hear. We're movin', frog."

Marie came over, and together they watched the lights of Sumay move slowly past, while the sputtering of the *Millie Miller's* gasoline engine grew steadily more rapid.

"We're bein' kidnaped, Frog!"

They searched the cabin for weapons, but found none. They looked in the bathroom forward, also in Rodrick's stateroom. They pulled out all drawers that weren't locked; ransacked the place. There was scarcely anything in Rodrick's lair but liquor. A bottle was the best weapon they could find.

The little monkey jumped about, from the top of one picture frame to the top of the next, grinning and screeching at them. Froggy shook his fist at him.

"Never again, on you or any of your family!"

Meanwhile the *Millie Miller* was rambling along seaward. The swish and swirl of racing water came through the portholes. They could hear voices and pattering feet on deck above. The ship had commenced to heave a little—from which Froggy knew they were getting out near the harbor entrance, where the ground swell began. Looking out through the port-side portholes they saw that the lights of Sumay were now well abaft, while Orote Point light, at the harbor entrance, showed high above them just ahead.

"Doggone it, Frog—" Froggy scratched his neck. "It looks like we're China bound!"

"Who feed ze chicking and ze pig and ze dog and ze billy-goat tomorrow morning?"

"Search us," he answered. "Likewise, who's gonna feed the gang up at the radio station?"

Marie launched forth upon a lengthy and venomous denunciation of Rodrick, finishing with—

"You knock for ze row of chicking coop!"

"What with? A bottle? And him with a gun? All I got with me is a regulation jack-knife!"

"You tell me you are ze grreatt fightaire."

"But he's got a gun, kid!"

The noise and vibration of the engine ceased. There came from above the hoarse voice of Rodrick, bellowing orders. Then the noise of canvas drumming and flapping in the wind told them sail was being made; and looking out to starboard they saw that she had cleared the harbor.

The light on towering Orote Point moved slowly to the left, as the ship's head swung round to the northward. The drum and roar of canvas ceased. A few gruff-voiced commands drifted from above. The ship lay over to port and settled at that angle, riding the long ground swell with a slow, buoyant rise and fall.

FROGGY LAPORTE had a keen nose. A most keen nose. It was that keen nose of his, coupled with an imagination that was ever and always conceiving some new palate-tickler, that had made him famous in the Navy as a ship's cook.

Lifting the glass Rodrick had placed before him and sniffing of its contents, Froggy instantly detected something alien to the smell of wine proper. He lifted Marie's glass and smelt of it. Then he held them alternately up to Marie's petite nose. She could smell no difference.

"Just the same there's a big difference, kid," he declared. "Mine's got something in it. Smells like almonds. I don't know what it is. Might be dope, or it might be straight poison."

He set down Marie's glass, but held on to his own.

"I see that old bum's game now, frog. Ain't to pay for that pearl in cash, eh? The old rat was gonna put me out, and then take you to Shanghai, kid, and trade you off to the old chink for that pearl!"

Froggy walked over to starboard and

looked out. Orote Point Light was still in sight, off the quarter now. The ship was running north, parallel to the island's western shore. She was about a mile off, he judged. He remained there a few minutes, then returned to the table.

"Kid," he said, the light of an idea in his black eyes, "I'm goin' to drink this."

He backed away, as she reached out for the glass.

"Now listen, frog, I know what I'm doin'! We're in a bad mess, and we've got to get out of it, and we ain't got many minutes! The ship's clear of the harbor now, and that bird'll be down *pronto*. But if you'll do just as I tell you, we might have a chance."

GUN in hand, Rodrick came down the companionway. His step was the slow, hesitant step of a heavy drinker in need of a drink. He was reeling slightly when he halted at the foot of the ladder; but what he saw instantly steadied him.

Froggy lay sprawled over in the chair, limp as a rag, arms dangling down over the sides, head sagging down over his left breast, mouth open and tongue half out. At his side stood Marie, white, disheveled, her eyes wide with stony madness. She backed away, cowering, as Rodrick advanced.

The monkey, on top of the buffet, still holding the pearl in his hands, set up a wild torrent of chattering.

"Shut up, you ——!" Rodrick snarled at him, and Monk's teeth clicked shut.

Rodrick stood glowering down upon the limp and lifeless form of Froggy. He emitted a grunt of satisfaction as he noted Froggy's half emptied glass, then turned his hideous face on Marie, cowering back against the port bulkhead, still regarding him with that wide-eyed, demented gaze.

"What'sa matter, chick?" He feigned sympathy. "Did your little frog husband go to sleep on yuh? —— of a husband that'll get drunk on a half a glass o' wine."

She only continued to stare at him with those wide, terror-filled eyes.

"Don't you care, chick," he went on. "I'll get yuh another husband. A rich one. Meanwhile yuh can have your pick between me and the monkey." He laughed. "Come on have a little swipe with me now. Your glass is all right. Your little frog husband's had a little cyanide in it, that was all. Ever hear of cyanide? Quickest sleep medicine known. They put elephants to sleep with it. Come on, now, and drink."

She made no move. She was like a beautiful graven image of marble, staring accusation at him.

As he looked at her Rodrick's hideous face sobered—or at least the grinning leer left it; as if deep down in him some vagrant spark of decency leaped into being and flared up and brimmed over. But it was as fleeting as a bolt of lightning. Whatever speck of soul might have remained in "Red" Rodrick, at that moment was submerged in red red rum.

"Well I'll be ——," he roused himself. "Plumb nuts."

He swore and scratched his red nose in disappointment.

"It'll never work," he growled, as if talking to the dead Froggy in the chair. "Old man Foo is gonna balk. She's plumb crazy!"

He took up his bottle and held it up to the lamp to see if it contained enough for a bracer. When he lowered it he was thoughtful. Slipping the gun in his coat pocket, he picked up his glass and poured it nearly full, emptying the bottle.

A crafty leer came over his face, as he looked down at the contents of that glass. He shifted the glass from right to left hand, and returned his right hand to his gun pocket. Then he began eyeing Froggy.

At that moment Froggy was eyeing *him*. With one eyelid raised about a sixteenth of an inch Froggy was able to see Rodrick's feet and legs under the table. He was speculating whether it would be a sane move to make a dive for those legs. For Froggy's endurance was about petered out. Playing dead was not easy for a man used to snapping his fingers and twisting his mustache.

Then Marie drew Rodrick's gaze. Pointing an accusing finger at him, in a low, cold tone she said:

"You poisin *mon* hoosbond. You murdaire *mon* grreatt Franceese."

So well did she perform it that her dead husband came near spoiling everything by snapping his fingers.

Rodrick looked at her and grinned.

"Well I'll be ——. Y'ain't all nuts, are yuh?"

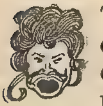
And with that—Red Rodrick's last earthly utterance—he lifted the glass and gulped down the deadly poison he had intended for Froggy Laporte. He turned ashen as the glass fell from his hand, and straightened up to his full height, his eyes bulging and the veins and muscles of his face puffing out. Comprehension and baffled rage gleamed in those bulging eyes, as they rolled and came to rest on Froggy. As he lifted the gun and pulled the trigger Marie let fly the bottle she had been holding behind her and Froggy dived under the table.

Forward across the smoke-filled cabin Rodrick went reeling, spinning round and round, falling all the time, and dropped in a lifeless heap at the bath room door on the right of the companionway.

With a catlike leap Froggy was on his feet. He snatched up the gun Rodrick had let fall.

"Keep back now, kid! Get over there! That gang of niggers are comin'!"

He danced over to the foot of the companionway. The monkey screeched, leaped down from on top of the buffet and came slithering over to Marie against the port bulkhead.



THEY came, four human monkeys, came patter-patter down the ladder into the smoky cabin, to be met by Froggy, gun in hand, and lined up soldier fashion against the starboard bulkhead.

When assured there were no more coming, Froggy cut loose. He got real hard-boiled. Flourishing the point of the pistol under the cringing quartet's brown noses, he belched forth some of the terrifying language he had heard used before coming into the Navy, when he had been a cabin-boy on a windjammer. He threw the fear of Froggy into them. In one minute they were no longer brown men but green men. They showed the whites of their eyes and through rattling teeth answered his questions.

There were three of the crew left on deck; one at the wheel, which was aft of the cabin; one on lookout, aloft in the foremast; and the cook, asleep in the foc'sle, who was deaf. The long-boat hung from its davits, amidships; it had not yet been rigged in and secured. The ship was logging about five knots—which is about twice as fast as a man can walk.

That was all Froggy wanted to know. He took a dagger from one of the Kanakas, a six-inch blade, sharp-pointed, double-edged, and handed it to Marie. Then he sent Marie up the companionway to see if there was a key in door above. There was.

"All right, kid; stay there," he called up. Then to the four Kanakas:

"If you guys want your brains scattered all over the deck, just beat down that door and try to come after us! Whichever one of youse wants to die first come at the head of the parade!"

He backed up the companionway and out on deck, locking the door behind him.

"GOT the dagger, kid?" he whispered to Marie.

"*Oui oui.* Ze baby moongkey too."

It was dark, black; there wasn't a star out. They could see nothing forward, but above them, like a wall of gray, the mainsail rose from the boom pointing out over the port side. A cool quarterly breeze fanned their faces. Peering aft around the corner of the hatch hood, dimly haloed in the ghostly glow of the binnacle light, Froggy could see the dusky monkeyish face of the helmsman, darting from side to side, apparently striving to penetrate the blackness forward and learn what all the commotion was about. Froggy chuckled.

"He can't see a thing, kid," he whispered; "the compass light blinds him. Come on."

They hurried forward along the starboard side to where the long-boat hung from its davits. The Kanakas had spoken the truth; the boat had not yet been rigged inboard, nor hoisted chock-a-block. It hung outboard, a little higher than the rail, so that it could be easily clambered into. The difficulty lay in getting her in the water.

Froggy took the monkey from Marie and tossed him in the boat. Then he helped Marie up over the bulwarks and aboard.

"Now don't get scared, frog," he cautioned, and then stepped quickly to the cleat on which the after fall, or hoisting halyard was made fast. Throwing the line off the cleat all but two turns, he slacked away slowly, gradually, thus lowering the boat's stern end. He lowered away about six feet, so that the boat hung bow-up—at a perilous slant for Marie and the monkey. Then he made fast and jumped to the forward cleat.

Came now a pattering of footfalls from forward. Froggy paused, his hand on the gun in his waistband. It was the lookout, who had slid down from the crow's-nest in the foremast and was coming to see what was what.

He saw stars. Employing the Frenchman's method of self-defense, Froggy kicked the Kanaka in the chin.

That left but one man on deck, the helmsman. Looking aft Froggy could see the light of the binnacle, but no face behind it. He returned quickly to his task of lowering the boat's forward end. He let her down till she hung level, several feet below the rail, a little above the water.

And now, from back aft, came what he had been hoping against—a hubbub of muffled voices and the thump and crash of heaving pounding. They were battering down the cabin door. That the helmsman had left the wheel was patent, for the ship had fallen off her course and her sails were flapping and drumming thunderously.

Froggy jumped down in the boat.

"Got that dagger, kid?"

"*Oui oui.*"

"Here!" He pulled her back in the stern sheets, took her left hand and placed it on one rope of the after fall. "When I give you the word, cut it!"

He jumped up in the bow. With his jack-knife in one hand and one rope of the forward fall in the other, he paused—for at that moment the ship lay far over to port, so that the boat hung in against her side.

Rupty dup dupty dup, drummed the canvas aloft.

"Wait, frog!"

And then, looking up Froggy saw heads and shoulders above the rail. He drew the gun and sent a belch of fire over them. The next moment the ship heeled back over to starboard—far over, so that they hung out wide and clear.

"Let's go!" Froggy shouted, and they both hacked away.

A squeak of the blocks, then *plop.* She struck the water, jiggling, rocking, tossing. Froggy cast off the forward hook and what short length of line remained attached to it, then stumbled aft and did likewise there. He grabbed up an oar to fend her off with; but this was unnecessary. With a swish and swirl and eddy of water the ship passed.

High up they rode to the crest of a long ridge of swell. Off in the yawning blackness they saw the schooner's white spread of canvas, and heard the rap and drum of it. Then down through the giddy void they went tobogganing, and everything was blotted out. When they rose to the crest of the next swell there was nothing to see. Not a star. Not even a tiny spark of phosphorescence in the water. Only blackness. And all they heard was the *lap lap lap* of the water under the boat.

"YOU'RE a little humdinger of a frog, all right," Froggy broke the silence. Then he lighted up a cigaret and sat back against the tiller to ponder the situation.

The boat rode the long ground swell easily, buoyantly, rising and falling from hollow to crest and crest to hollow.

"But if we ain't two frogs in a hole, I'm a Chinaman," Froggy went on. "I know we're west of Guam and Guam is east of us. But for a million dollars and fifteen cents I couldn't tell you which is east!"

"*Oui oui. Le levant,*" replied Marie. Then in an aside to the monkey—

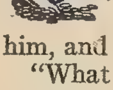
"Give to ze mamma ze pearl."

"East, yah! Try to find it! I'd like to see tha navigator that could be dumped in the sea in the dark, with no compass and no stars, and find his way to the beach!"

"*Bavardage!* Keep quiet ze bazoo! You wake ze baby moongkey!"

Dawn came at last, and that was all Froggy needed. The moment the sky began to brighten in the east, he knew how to head. Marie took the tiller and he the oars, and away they went from crest to crest toward daylight and home.

Soon from ahead came the distant boom and roar of breakers. Then the day broke, and there they were, right off the city of Agana, where they had started from the evening before.



THE pearl? Froggy argued that by right of possession it belonged to the monkey, who, by right of conquest, belonged to Marie and him, and finished with—

"What more do you want?"

After landing that morning they induced the monk to trade the pearl for a banana.

They sold that pearl to a congressman who, *en route* for the Philippines, one day stopped off at Guam. With the money they ordered a brand new lizzie, paid a year's rent on their bungalow—and had some left.

FLY

A Complete Novelette

By

L. Patrick Greene

Author of "The Flame," "—and of Gideon," etc.

THE air in the mission's big assembly room was stifling. It reeked with the sweat of naked bodies; mingling with the odor of sweat was that of rancid fat, red pigment, cheap scent and cheaper pomade—according to the progression toward the white man's civilization the individual native had made—with which the natives present had anointed themselves.

The heat was excessive; the opened windows afforded no relief—not a breath of wind stirred—and the cloying, nauseating stench seemed almost a suffocating dust cloud, seemed to have material form.

Seated on a large chair placed on a dais at one end of the room sat the missionary to Macombe's district—Paul Miles. He wore cap and gown and the red-lined ermine hood of his degree.

His attitude was one of great concentration; his expression, gravely judicial. As he leaned forward, his firm, truculent chin resting on the palm of his right hand, the fingers of his left hand drumming a rapid tattoo on the deal table before him, his blue eyes sparkled vivaciously.

Once, raising his head, he met the glance of a white man who sat at the very back of the room, near the open door. A comical appearing little man. The bridge of the strong-lensed glasses he wore cut deeply into his large Semitic nose; perched jauntily on the back of his head was a large cloth cap—its pattern an ugly black and red check—the long visor of which, rising perpendicularly, made a motley frame for his black, curly hair; his crimson-striped silk shirt, and his flowing bow tie of purple and green spots on a cerise background, made a nightmarish clash of color. But when he smiled, as he smiled now, his strong white teeth flashing between his full, red-blooded, slightly parted lips, the incongruity of his appearance was somewhat forgotten.

As he met the glance of Miles, the missionary, the little man made a wry expression of disgust and pinched his nose with thumb and forefinger.

The missionary shook his head disapprovingly and then looked away quickly. But his shoulders were shaking slightly, the corners of his mouth twitched, and he was forced to bury his head in a large handkerchief in order to stifle an almost overwhelming urge to laugh.

Regaining control of himself he applied himself with increased concentration to the noisy babel of argument, of accusation and counter-accusation, which was going on between the natives who filled the room.

He carefully avoided looking in the direction of the little man again.

Time dragged on.

Graybeard after graybeard advanced to the cleared space just before the dais and made lengthy, illogical exhortations, appealing occasionally to the others for confirmation of a statement; leaping high into the air with an exultant shout of "You hear it?"

when the confirmation was given; shouting abuse when it was withheld.

Miles moved uneasily, glanced at his watch, took off his "mortar-board" and brushed back the lock of his flaming red hair which fell down over his forehead.

He pounded on the table presently with his clenched fist, demanding silence; forestalling an old man who had just advanced to the speaker's place and, as a preliminary to verbal acrobatics, was indulging in wild capers—jumping high into the air, clapping his heels together, beating his thighs with the palms of his hands, making crowing, rooster-like noises.

The hubbub gradually lessened, gave place to vague murmurings, ceased entirely.

But the old graybeard still capered and the silence was punctuated by rifle-like reports as he slapped his naked thighs.

"Hear me," he called in a high, shrill voice. "I speak of goats—"

"Act less like a goat, old one," Miles interrupted. "It is now my time to bleat."

The old man looked indignantly at the missionary and then gestured appealingly to the others. Then, seeing that their attention was not for him, that their eyes were riveted upon the white man, he gave an embarrassed squawk and running to his place among the graybeards squatted down on his haunches. The expression on his face was one of outraged dignity, of bewilderment.

"I was to have spoken of goats," he muttered.

Those near him burst into loud laughter.

"The *umfundisi* is all-wise," they assured him. "The missionary has heard enough of goats and will now give judgment."

"Yes, I will now give judgment," Miles said slowly, weighing each word carefully, forming it silently first as one will when speaking an unfamiliar tongue. Even so he made some grievous errors—his voice was too harsh, too nasal, to give the liquid vowels of the vernacular their proper values.

"And now come before me—" the little man at the rear of the room chuckled softly at the phrasing—"Cuntete and Kimaru regarding the ownership of the offspring of certain goats given by Kimaru to Cuntete, five years ago, as security for a loan. The loan having now been repaid, Kimaru demands the return of the goats and their offspring. Cuntete, claiming that the goats' offspring are his, refuses to give them up. Failing to come to an agreement, the two men, Kimaru and Cuntete, bring the matter to me for judgment.

"SINCE the rising of the sun until now, long past its noon, I have listened to talk about these goats—to the talk of Cuntete and his witnesses; and to the talk of Kimaru and his witnesses. I have almost been drowned by a flood of words. So many words have been poured upon me that it was hard for me to keep to the ford which leads from one side to the other; hard it has been to discern the false from the true."

The little man at the back of the room nodded silent approval.

"Aye," Miles continued, "I have listened to many words having little purpose. And because Cuntete and his people give the lie to certain words of Kilmaru and his people—who pass the lie back—the truth is still as far from us as the bottom of the Lake of the Dead Spirits. And that, as you know, has no bottom.

"This then is my judgment—

"The offspring of the goats shall be divided equally between Cuntete and Kimaru. I have spoken.

"And now," Miles assumed a more conversational tone, "I want you to think over the way we have done things here today. There has been no talk of slaying, no challenge to the *mondjo* ordeal or to the licking of hot iron. Yet we have arrived at justice.

"Go your ways then and think over these things. Let it be known to every one that I am always ready to listen to grievances and to pass judgment according to the light given me. That is all—you may go."

Quickly then the litigants, their witnesses, their interested friends and those drawn to the trial by idle curiosity, left the room, talking excitedly in high-pitched, querulous voices, jostling one another, indulging in light-hearted, boisterous horseplay.

When they had all gone Miles leaped down from the dais, his gown fluttering behind him, and walked quickly to where the little man awaited him.

"Vot a stink, Missioner!" the little man said in a deep, booming voice. "Let's get outside."

He led the way through the open door and sat down on a wooden bench near-by.

Miles sat down beside him and fanned himself with his cap.

"You shouldn't have tweaked your nose, 'Big 'Un,' " he said reproachfully. "I nearly choked trying to stop from laughing."

"But it was a great success, wasn't it?" It was a confident statement rather than a question. "Of course there are several things to be improved—it's so hard to keep the witnesses to the point; they always want to tell their life history—but all that will come in time."

He laughed happily, was silent for a little while and then continued:

"I'm afraid I'm getting conceited, Big 'Un. The fact that they're willing to bring their disputes to me for settlement is such a big step forward, though; it's such a decisive proof that my mission is bearing fruit, that they are done for ever with the old superstitions. A year ago, six months ago, they would have settled this goat dispute by drinking poison or licking a bar of hot iron and the judgment would have gone against the man who was sickest, or whose tongue showed the most blisters—"

He clasped his hands about his knees and gazed dreamily across the valley.

The little man—Big 'Un Isaacs, the storekeeper—looked at him sharply and then at the natives—the plaintiff and defendant in the recent hearing with all their witnesses—who were slowly descending the winding path which led from the mission to the kraal in the valley below. They were talking excitedly.

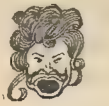
Miles came abruptly from his reverie.

"It was a success, Big 'Un, wasn't it?" he asked. There was a pathetic eagerness in his voice now. His moment of confident exultation had passed.

"Vell," Isaacs replied slowly, studiously looking away from the missionary, "mebbe it vas, mebbe it vasn't. I've never smelled so many fine smells. Vhere did they get the scent from, Missioner? Not from my store, I don't keep it. I—"

"It came out in that box sent by the 'Busy Fingers Missionary Aid Society'," Miles interrupted hastily.

"Oy!" Isaacs exclaimed sarcastically. "Vasn't that nice of them? An' I suppose them corsets and ladies' things old Melefe vas vearing come out of the same box, eh? Vell! Better that that old graybearded dandy vear them than any of the vomen. But I'm ashamed of you, Missioner. You make me vant to swear. It's a vonder you don't try to make all the vomen vear them oogly Mother Hubbard things. Oy! You don't paint the lily—you an' the 'Busy Fingers' throw mud on it. Look at that fellow—" he pointed to a stalwart native, naked save for a ghee-string, his skin gleaming like polished copper, his muscles rippling freely—"I suppose you vant to dress him like the vay I'm dressed. I suppose if you had a lion for a pet you'd clip it and shampoo it till it looked like a French poodle. Not to mention the scent you'd sprinkle on it! Oy! I'm ashamed of you, Missioner. I thought you knew better."



MILES laughed.

"I do, Big 'Un," he said earnestly. "But when I opened the box the natives about seemed so eager to have the things—just like children, you know—that I gave them to them."

"A fine father you'd make," Isaacs commented. "That's the way to spoil children—giving them vot they vant an' not thinkin' vhether it's good for them or not."

"But it can't do any harm," Miles expostulated. "A few—er—articles of wearing apparel and two or three boxes of scented soap—that's all. No harm in that, surely?"

"No—perhaps not," Isaacs said dubiously. "Only them that ain't got 'u'll come an' try to buy from me and if I don't get the thing for them they'll go somewhere else."

"Tell me about the trial," Miles interrupted impatiently. "It was a success, wasn't it?"

Isaacs turned to him, his face grave.

"You really vant to know vat I think, Missioner?"

"Of course."

"Vell—" very slowly—"I think you looked vonderful in that cap and gown; and that hood—" he fingered attentively—"rabbit fur, ain't it?"

"No," Miles said shortly. "Ermine. But you haven't answered my question, Big 'Un."

"No? Vell, I'll tell you, Missioner: It vas wrong all 'round."

He hunched up his shoulders until they touched his large, outstanding ears, and spread his hands wide as the missionary expostulated heatedly.

"Yah, all wrong," he repeated. "First you should have held court outside here—they didn't have room to talk in there."

"Talk?" Miles echoed bitterly. "They didn't do anything but talk."

"Sure," Isaacs agreed complacently. "But they vanted to talk more—three or four days more, maybe. An' you shouldn't have stopped them vhen you did or how you did; you shouldn't have talked so rudely— Oy! I know you thought it vas clever; so it vould have been out of court—to the old fellow who vas just starting to say something."

"But you're picking on all the minor incidentals, Big 'Un," Miles said in a hurt voice. "They're just trivial things—"

"Nothing ain't trivial vhen you're dealing with these people, Missioner."

"But the main thing, Big 'Un?" Miles urged. "Isn't the fact that they came to me a sign of success? Wasn't my verdict a wise one?"

"Sure, Missioner. It vas a grand thing that they came to you. Sure it vas. But your verdict— Oy! That vas bad. You were thinking of Solomon, not? The time vhen he threatened to cut the baby in half, eh? But with these people that judgment vould have been bad. If the two women had been of this people they vould have let the baby be cut in half because the judge ordered it. But they vould not have been satisfied, no. They don't understand such judgments. And you should have said that Cuntete vas right and should keep all the goats' offspring, or that he was wrong and must give them all up. But, according to you, he vas neither right nor wrong—and that is bad."

"But how could I judge other than I did, Big 'Un, according to the evidence?"

"Listen, Missioner: These people don't understand law like vot whites do. They came to you for a positive verdict and you didn't give it to them. They vould have accepted any such verdict you'd given. They vanted to know vhether a thing vas black or vhite—and you tell 'em it is neither. That von't do at all, not vith these people. An', anyhow, even according to vhite man's law, your verdict vas wrong."

"I don't see—"

"You vill in a minute. Listen. Suppose I lend you my horse an' you give me fifty pounds security. Vell, I put that fifty pounds out to vork for me and it earns interest. Vhen you return the horse—do you think you're going to get back the fifty pounds *and* the interest it's earned?"

"Of course not."

"Vell— Cuntete put the goats Kimaru gave him as security out to vork for him; the offspring are the interest earned, not? And so they all belong to Cuntete. Vell?"

"I don't think they're parallel cases," Miles demurred slowly. "And if they are," he added triumphantly, "don't forget that my verdict was accepted."

"Ah! But vas it?" Isaacs murmured very softly. Then, aloud, "Vell, vot else did you vant me for?"

Miles sprang to his feet, his eyes glistening, the missionary entirely submerged.

"To go hunting."

Isaacs looked at him affectionately.

"Oy! Vot a man you are. Such a killer. To hunt vot?"

"Buffalo."

"*Izinkomo ka M'limo*,* eh?" Isaacs squinted thoughtfully. "That's bad."

Miles laughed and taking hold of the other's hand pulled him to his feet.

"Come on. We'll have some food first and then be off. Didn't bring your gun, I see. Never mind. I'll lend you one of mine."

"But this ain't no time of day to go huntin', Missioner. Besides, you're foolin' me, not? There ain't no buffalo in this district—ain't been any to speak of for over twenty years. I ain't likely to forget vhen they vas here last, either. My! I vas nearly ruined. My cattle—"

"Then you haven't heard? No one's told you?" Miles cried boisterously. "For once I'm able to tell you something. A big herd crossed the borders last night. They're down in the reed swamps—hundreds, thousands of them."

"OY! THAT'S bad. I don't like it." Isaacs shook his head ruefully.

Miles chuckled.

"You're a holy fraud, Big 'Un, pretending you're afraid to hunt buffalo. But you can't fool me—"

"It ain't that," Isaacs said patiently. "I ain't exactly afraid of buffalo—though I ain't got no love for 'em neither. They're hard to kill, an' they're cunning, an', Oy! Vot sharp horns they have got. I know." He rubbed his thigh reflectively. "No. I ain't exactly afraid of them—it's the things that hunt vith 'em I'm afraid of."

**God's cattle.*

"Oh, come on now, you old croaker. I've had enough of your pessimistic howlings. What hunts with buffalo that you're afraid of?"

"Fly."

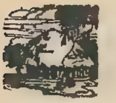
Miles roared with laughter, laughed until tears trickled down his face and until a native came out of the mission's living quarters and announced that lunch was ready by beating on an old tin pail.

"Race you to the skoff hut, Mister Afraid-of-Flies," Miles gasped and holding up his gown he raced to the hut.

Isaacs followed slowly, waddling slightly in his gait, the bowed curve of his pipe-stem legs intensified by the ill-fitting riding breeches he wore.

"That young Missioner feller is goin' too fast," he muttered. "He'll stub his toe and fall badly if he ain't more careful—

"An' them flies, now—they've got vun aitch of a bite."



DOWN in the swampy center of the valley—a place generally avoided by man and beast—the heat was oppressive. The tall reeds which flourished there, the patches of thorn, the papyrus thickets, the slimy rubber creepers and the oozy, slippery black mud—all that made walking difficult—served to make the heat more unendurable; a yellowish mist always hovered above the place; it was a snakes' Paradise and, therefore, a man's—specially a white man's—hell.

Miles, the missionary, was drenched with sweat. His face was ashen and the tenseness of his jaw muscles, the constant twitching of the corners of his mouth gave evidence of the severe physical—and mental—strain to which trekking in this fever-ridden, man-avoided spot subjected him.

Isaacs—leaner, wiry, fully acclimated to all of Africa's moods—seemed as fresh as when he left the mission three hours ago. Hardened campaigner that he was, he had the faculty of completely relaxing whenever the opportunity arose and rested, even when trekking; moving with the minimum of effort, his gait slouching, springless.

Both men's progress was silent—a native hunter could not have moved less silently. But where silence came to Isaacs instinctively, without effort, Miles was forced to concentrate on every step. Isaacs walked with the assurance of a man who has a broad, open trail before him; Miles walked like a novice tightrope performer who is acutely conscious that a misstep means a nasty fall.

Occasionally Isaacs, who was in the lead, would halt and test the direction of the wind by moistening his finger and holding it above his head; or, when not satisfied with that, he knocked the dead ashes out of the bowl of his pipe and threw them into the air.

Always when confronted by an exceptionally thick patch of reeds he would make a detour or, if that were not feasible, parted the reeds carefully and peer cautiously ahead before each step.

Marsh birds flew above their heads; blue water-hens twittered uncannily.

"They're talking to the fishes," Isaacs explained in a low whisper and thumbed his nose when the missionary pulled down his eye-lid and voicelessly mouthed the skeptical query—"Do you see any green?"

A flock of weavers whirled past, their wings making an ominous humming sound; crested cranes, silhouetted against the violet haze of the sky, appeared strangely wraith-like.

Coming presently to rising ground, a comparative dry spot in the sea of mud, Isaacs squatted on his haunches, native fashion, and looked reproachfully at Miles.

"You ain't having a game with me, are you, Missioner? Or perhaps I didn't hear you properly. I thought you said there vas hundreds, thousands, of buffalo here. Maybe it vas mosquitos you vas thinking of. Oy! Such a trek it's been. I've ruined my shoes and torn my breeches—an' look at my shirt! It's all torn to ribbons an' I've only worn it vunce. It cost a guinea, too—never think it now, vould you?"

Miles smiled.

"The colors are still in their pristine glory, Big 'Un. And, do you know—never thought of it before—I believe you wear those hideous shirts because they blend in with the scenery. Talk about protective coloration! A chameleon isn't in it with you, Big 'Un."

Isaacs chuckled softly.

"You're getting very clever, Missioner, or maybe you're pulling my leg. Vell—let's start for home. It's a long vay back to vhere we left the horses. They'll be eaten alive by flies if we leave 'em too long."

Miles' face fell.

"But we haven't seen a buffalo yet, Big 'Un, much less shoot one."

"And who fault is that, Missioner? It vas you who said buffalo vas here—I didn't. And vot do you vant to shoot vun for? They ain't hurt you—yet."

"Just a matter of pride, Big' Un," the missionary confessed. "There's an old fire-eater of a colonel back home who thinks clergymen are only fit for pink teas and all that. He's shot big game all over the world—but he's never managed to get a buffalo. He says they are as dangerous as lions and he'd give an eye-tooth to have shot one. So I want to get a good head and send it to him as a—er—peace offering."

Isaacs chuckled again.

"You mean you vant to crow over him, Missioner. Sure, vhy not? I like you vhen you talk that vay; it's a proof you're joost like other men even if you do wear your collar the wrong vay round.

"Vell, if you must have a buffalo you must. Come on—an' keep your eyes peeled sharp. I vunce ran into a buffalo in grass like this an' if he hadn't been as surprized as I vas—I vouldn't be alive now. Come on!"

He rose to his feet, ready to proceed, but Miles hesitated and looked doubtfully at the little man.

"Look here, Big 'Un," he said flatly. "If you're pulling my leg or trying to teach me a lesson, say so. A little while ago you said there were no buffalo here and wanted to go back. Now, you're eager to go on. I'm just about all in and if you're intending to wander through this muck and heat and spear grass, with snakes wriggling under foot and mosquitos and flies— Ugh! How they bite!—just to prove to me that you were right and there aren't any buffalo—why, let me tell you that you've proved your point already and I'm not going a step farther."

"I ain't pulling your leg, Missioner, an' I didn't say there vasn't any buffalo. There is—vish there vasn't though— Can't you smell anything?"

Miles sniffed loudly. There was a strong barnyardish tang in the air.

"IS THAT buffalo?" he asked excitedly.

Isaacs nodded.

"Then why haven't I noticed it before?"

"It's been there all the time, Missioner—but you ain't learned yet to hunt with all your senses. You've been looking so hard you couldn't smell and you couldn't hear. Now listen."

Miles listened intently and instantly the long grass about them echoed with low, rumbling noises.

"That's buffalo, too," Isaacs said tersely. "Now come on, Missioner, and vhen you see vun and shoot, see you drop him at the first shot—or miss altogether. If you don't, maybe you von't get another chance to shoot anything."

They went on again; Miles following closely in Isaacs' footsteps, listening, his nose dilated to catch any change of scent. So earnestly did he concentrate on the use of these two senses that his progress was no longer silent and when Isaacs suddenly halted, Miles barged heavily into him, knocking him into a pool of slimy water.

"You hunt with your eyes," Isaacs said disgustedly, as he rose to his feet. "You look vhere you're going and vhere you put your feet. You're making as much noise as a hippo. I'll do all the sniffing and hearing for you. Come on!"

They went on again; Miles' eyes glued to the small of Isaacs' back; taking care to step exactly where the little man stepped.

As the reeds got thicker their progress became slower; several times they had to travel on hands and knees to make any headway at all.

"We're fools to hunt buffalo this way," Isaacs muttered once. "Vot in aitch vould we do if a bull charged us now I don't know."

An hour passed. The sun was approaching its time of setting; the clouds of insects which hovered above the two men increased, settling on them whenever they stopped—feasting hungrily.

Once they passed over a wide tract where the grass had been trodden flat by the passage of a large herd of buffalo; the rumblings were constant; the stench persisted. But not once did the men get a view of the beasts they were seeking.

Miles, utterly exhausted, demoralized by the air of stagnation which pervaded the place, began to think that they were following phantom animals—doubted their existence; doubted his own existence.

He felt as if he were wandering aimlessly in an empty, voiceless wilderness; he had lost all track of time and direction: He breathed, he saw, he walked—otherwise he seemed to have lost all sense of being. His inner self seemed to look down upon his tired body from some high pinnacle, pitying it; resenting the insects which tormented it, feasting on its blood; resenting the thorn scub, which tore its flesh, the heat, the labor of following the little man who went onward so resolutely, so tirelessly—so remorsefully. And presently, this feeling of resentment was all leveled at Isaacs, as if he were the cause of all the weariness and discomforts. Miles was horrified at his thoughts, tried to dismiss them, to think of other things. But they persisted until, finally, he found a measure of grim satisfaction in gloating over his fancied wrongs and in imagining himself a martyr to Isaacs' insatiable hunting instinct.

At times of great bodily weariness, when the blood—already thinned by countless attacks of fever—is being tapped by a horde of winged evils, when Africa's sun causes fever mists to rise from dreary swamps, the brain is often deluded into strange fancies and thrives on unjust, illogical suspicions.

Isaacs halted and turned around to face Miles.

"They're just ahead," he began, then stopped abruptly, worried by the glazed look in Miles' eyes.

There was a loud trampling noise in the reed patch just ahead; the reeds shook violently, parted, and a buffalo emerged and stood glaring suspiciously at the two men. Its nose was outstretched toward them, its horns covering the wide spread of its shoulders. Its little red eyes blinked viciously as it savagely pawed the ground.

Isaacs did not move, although he felt that the beast's eyes were riveted on the small of his back, although he momentarily expected it to charge.

He was watching Miles. And Miles acted like a man in a dream—seeing nothing.

After long minutes of indecision the buffalo snorted, swung round sharply and disappeared into the reeds.

Miles sighed loudly, stretched himself like a man awakening from a heavy sleep, and looked wonderingly at Isaacs.

"It's hot, ain't it," the little man said soothingly. "Maybe we'd better go back now; maybe there ain't no buffalo after all."

Miles shook his head obstinately.

"And have you laugh at me for being a quitter? No. We'll go on for a while longer—I thought I saw one a moment ago."

Isaacs nodded.

"Africa's funny that way! A feller often thinks he sees things vot he doesn't." He shrugged his shoulders. "Vell, suppose you break trail now, eh? I'm tired and—"

Miles went forward silently until he came to the place where the buffalo had stood. Then, seeing the tracks he shouted fiercely:

"There was one—I did see one. You tried to fool me. You don't want me to shoot one. You're afraid the natives will think I'm a better man than you are. You're jealous because they are starting to bring their grievances to me—"

He dashed madly into the reeds, following the spoor of the bull.

"Oy!" Isaacs sighed, following at a run, releasing the safety catch of his rifle. "Vot a country this Africa is—and the missioner—he don't know buffalo like vot I do."

* * *

"Missioner," he called. "Vait for me. These buffalo fellers are bad actors."

But Miles ran on, blundering through the reeds, floundering in the mud, forgetful of everything, possessed solely with the desire to kill a buffalo and prove to the little Jew that he was a great hunter, that he was well able to take care of himself.

Presently the massive form of the big bull he was following loomed up ominously before him.

He fired hurriedly and cried with triumph when the beast dropped to the ground with a noisy bellow.

"Vait, Missioner," Isaacs yelled again, as Miles ran heedlessly forward, and then flung himself face forward on the ground, covering his head with his arms, endeavoring to contract himself into a very small depression in order to escape being trampled upon by the herd of buffalo which instantly broke cover in a frenzied stampede.

Almost immediately the buffalo disappeared, vanished as mysteriously as they had appeared.

Isaacs rose and looked anxiously for Miles. That man was just scrambling to his feet—he had been knocked down by a yearling calf. He was now stooping over, searching the ground for his rifle which the blundering calf had knocked from his hands.

Isaacs advanced warily to help the missionary in his search, mentally cursing himself for having so foolishly followed buffalo into this most dangerous of all hunting grounds, acutely aware that the reeds about him were alive with buffalo, fearing another stampede—a stampede of anger, this time, of ruthless intent to kill, instead of one of surprize.

He was about ten yards from the missionary, seeing him indistinctly through the tangle of reeds which, flattened by the stampede, were slowly returning to the upright, when he heard a hoarse bellow, followed by a startled cry from Miles.

Speeding forward, he saw that the bull which the missionary had fired at and believed he had killed, had scrambled to its feet and was now moving slowly, ominously, swaying slightly, toward him.

"Down, Missioner! Down, you fool," Isaacs shouted and halting, put his rifle to his shoulder and attempted to get his sights aligned on a spot between the bull's eyes.

But Miles—he was standing erect now—was directly in the line of fire; he seemed to be incapable of movement.

"——!" Isaacs gasped as he ran forward again. "Vot a fool!"

He charged with all his force into Miles, getting his shoulder well into the missionary's ribs, knocking him sidewise, well out of the course of the buffalo.

The force of the charge carried Isaacs staggeringly forward and the bull—having partially recovered from the stunning effect of Miles' shot—broke into a lumbering gallop and charged at this new apparition, this new menace to its peace and right to live.

With an effort Isaacs recovered his balance, but before he could bring his rifle up to his shoulder again the buffalo was upon him, its head lowered, ready to inflict a death wound with its sweeping, scimiter-sharp horns.

Isaacs leaped desperately to one side—the bull's head swung viciously—a horn ripped through Isaacs' shirt, grazing his ribs.

Isaacs ran swiftly, heading along the trail the beast had made, thumping the bull on the flanks as he passed with his clenched fist.

The big black warden of the marshes dropped suddenly, slid some distance on his stern and then started to turn, intending to give chase to this puny two-legged thing which had so daringly insulted it; snorting with rage at the burning, biting pain in its vitals.

And then Miles rose to his feet, not ten feet before it.

It stood for a moment, motionless, undecided whether to turn and give chase to Isaacs or go forward and annihilate this other.

The internal, consuming fire increased; it bellowed fearfully as if sensing the nearness of death, then rushed forward—determined to kill before it died.

A shot sounded, swiftly followed by others.

Isaacs had turned and now was pumping lead into the bull's rear with incredible speed.

It collapsed suddenly, but the momentum of its rush carried it forward into Miles, knocking him over.

It struggled to rise, failed, bellowed again —and then was very still.

Isaacs advanced cautiously, his rifle up to his shoulder, his finger ready on the trigger.

"Missioner!" he called. "You all right?"

There was no answer. The little man broke into a cold sweat. He was afraid that the buffalo's indomitable spirit had kept it alive long enough to achieve its purpose; that it had killed before it died.

He came to the carcass, walked round to its head and there, just before the beast's outstretched nose, lay Miles, plastered with mud, his eyes closed.

"Oy!" Isaacs exclaimed. "Vot a fool I am!" Reproaching himself for having led the missionary on such a dangerous hunt; forgetting, in the bigness of his heart and the intensity of his sorrow, that Miles had insisted on the expedition, had been determined to hunt the buffalo alone if need be.

"Oy!" he exclaimed again. The expression of extreme misery on his face as he knelt down beside the missionary was pathetically comical.

And at that moment Miles opened his eyes, blinked and sat up. He shook as if with ague.

"You all right, Missioner?" Isaacs asked anxiously.

Miles nodded.

"He didn't touch me," he gasped, still not quite sure of himself, apparently greatly puzzled by the look of deep concern in Isaacs' eyes.

And then, suddenly, his strength coming back to him, he found relief from the great strain he had been under in laughter—Isaacs kneeling there in the mud, a look of deep concern in his face, tears trickling down his nose, his gaudy shirt torn and splattered with mud, seemed to him at that moment an object of ridicule.

"You—you look so funny, Big 'Un," he gasped. "You look so funny."

Isaacs' reaction was instantaneous. He gave no thought to the fact that he had risked his life to save the man who was now laughing at him. His chief emotion was one of overpowering relief that Miles was alive, unhurt; he felt, too, angrily self-conscious at his display of tears. His emotions were manifested in a peculiar way.

"You—you go to ——, Missioner." There was a sobbing catch in his voice. "You go to ——." He struck Miles on the cheek with the flat of his hand and, rising, ran swiftly away, disappearing amongst the chaos of reeds.

Miles sobered instantly.

"Big 'Un," he shouted desperately, jumping to his feet. "Big 'Un, come back."

There was no answer.

He grinned uneasily and sitting down on the carcass of the buffalo gave himself up to a riot of conflicting thoughts.

"Why did I laugh at him," he muttered. "But how was I to know he'd take it like that? He—" a note of bitter resentment came into his voice as his earlier mood of the day returned to him— "he had no business to take offense just because I laughed. He's laughed at me lots of times— He's been funny all day—not like his old self. His jealousy has ruined his sense of proportion. First he made petty criticisms about the trial; then he tells an impossible story about flies the buffalo bring with them and then he tried his best to prevent me from shooting buffalo—he knew that it would increase my prestige in the eys of the natives. He's jealous because he sees I can get along without his help now.

"Anyway," he sounded aggressively triumphant, "my trial was a success, that fly theory is all bosh and I have shot a buffalo— But did I?"

He rose, savagely kicked the dead beast and walked morosely away.

THE moon was high when Isaacs came to the place where the horses were tethered. Mounting his, he rode swiftly toward the hill upon the top of which he had built his store.

At the foot of the winding trail which led to his place he met the native Cuntete, driving before him a flock of goats.

Isaacs reined in his horse and called the native to him. After exchanging the customary greetings, he said—

"So the matter between you and Kilmaru is settled, eh, Cuntete?"

"Yes, Great-Heart," the native replied meekly.

"And you would have me believe that you have accepted the *umfundisi's* judgment?"

"Without doubt, Great-Heart."

"And that these goats represent but half of the flock concerning which the dispute arose?"

"As you say." Cuntete grinned uneasily, looked away from the white man and scuffled with his naked feet in the red dust of the veld.

"I think you lie," Isaacs exclaimed witheringly.

"It grows late, white man," Cuntete remarked absently. "I must hurry to my kraal lest the moon set and darkness find me still on my way."

"I ask a question about goats," Isaacs said sternly, "and you give me foolish words about the moon. Also, you speak strangely. Did I not know you I should judge you to have an impediment in your speech; would say that the spirits had tied the cords of your tongue. Open your mouth and put out your member of speech."

Cuntete unwillingly obeyed the white man's command and displayed a swollen tongue covered with heat blisters.

"It is enough," Isaacs said absently. "It is as I thought. So you and Kilmaru did not accept the *umfundisi's* judgment? You have been licking the hot spear blade?"

Cuntete shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you, Great-Heart?" he said earnestly. "You know that the *umfundisi's* judgment was wrong. The goats were all mine, or all Kilmaru's. They could not be part mine—part his. And so we appealed to the hot blade of an assegai to decide which of us spoke true word. Kilmaru licked it—and I licked it. And the hot iron—it is known to you that it detests lies—awarded the goats to me. Au-a!" He chuckled softly. "You should see Kilmaru's tongue, Great-Heart. It is all blister. He will not talk again for many days. May I go now?" He started to move off.

"Wait!" Isaacs tore a leaf from his

pocket note-book, scribbled a few words on it and handed it to Cuntete. “Give that to the *umfundisi*,” he said, and rode on.

Coming to his attractive, well built store buildings, Isaacs dismounted stiffly, gave his horse into the care of a white-clad native, ordered another to prepare a hot bath and then turned with an exclamation of pleased surprize to greet a tall, thin man, wearing the uniform of a trooper of the B. S. A. P., who was lolling in a deck chair near by.

“ ’Ullo, Dixon,” he said. “Vot are you doing here?”

“Hoped to get a feed, Big ’Un—but not a bite would these niggers of yours give me. Said I must wait until you returned, blast ’em!”

“Oy! Vot a pity. I must talk to them. And you’re hungry, not?”

“Been ridin’ since sun-up this morning. But I can wait now until you’re ready,” he added hastily as Isaacs was about to shout an order.

“Sure, Dixon?”

Isaacs peered at him doubtfully.

“Yep,” the policeman said positively. “Get a better feed if I wait.”

A native brought out another deck chair and placed it close to Dixon’s. Isaacs dropped into it with a weary sigh.

For a little while the men were silent, as old friends sometimes are when meeting after a long separation.

“What have you been doing, Big ’Un?” the policeman asked suddenly, looking curiously at the little man.

“Huntin’.”

“Hunting what? Mud-eels, judging by the look of you.”

“Huntin’ buffalo, Dixon.”

“Oh!” Dixon’s voice was sharp. “So they’re here now, eh?”

Isaacs nodded.

“——! Where? How many?”

“Big herd down in the swamps.”

“And you hunted them there, Big ’Un?” Dixon sounded incredulous. “You went in the swamps after buffalo! Why, you’re mad, man! Next thing you’ll be trying to catch crocs by tickling them as if they were trout.”

“The missioner vanted to go—an’ so I took him,” Isaacs explained lamely.

Dixon snorted.

“You do too much for that reverend gentleman, Big ’Un. Why don’t you turn him loose from your apron strings and let him fend for himself?”

“He’s cut himself loose, Dixon. He don’t need me no more,” Isaacs said simply, and told of the day’s events. But he omitted to mention that the natives had refused to accept the missionary’s judgment and forgot to mention the part he had played in the buffalo hunt—giving all the credit to Miles.

Dixon laughed skeptically.

“TELL that to the Marines,” he said rudely. “You don’t expect me to believe all that, do you? Miles is a good fellow, all right; good for a missionary, that is. At times he’s almost human. But he’s no hunter, and as for handling natives, he can’t do a thing without your help, Big ’Un. His religion rides him too hard for him ever to understand the people as you understand them; he’s too —— sure that his own code of what’s right is the only one to make allowances for that of others. And he forgets that little things—”

“Like flies,” Isaacs interrupted softly.

Dixon looked at the storekeeper thoughtfully and continued:

“He forgets that little things very often lead to big things—if they’re not already big things. ——! There ain’t no little things in this country. Why—”

“That’s what I told him this morning,” Isaacs commented and added hurriedly, interrupting another flow of oratory from the policeman, “but vot do you think you’re doing, Dixon? Addressing a meeting? Here, vot I vant to know is—vot brings you here?”

“Fly,” answered Dixon tersely. “They’ve got cattle plague bad over the border—broke out suddenly. Hadn’t you heard?”

Isaacs shook his head.

“What’s the matter with the signal drums, then?”

Isaacs shrugged his shoulders.

“They ain’t been talking lately, Dixon. The missioner, he thinks they’re devil things; the people dance to them— Oy! Such naughty dances! And so they ain’t bein’ used now.”

“——!” Dixon spat contemptuously. “There, now! That’s just the sort of thing I mean. Miles can’t understand. Suppose the people do dance? What about it? Don’t white folks dance? Don’t the people in Miles' church back home dance?"

"But not such dances, Dixon," Isaacs said with a chuckle. "The missioner says these dances are 'beastly—sexual—immoral.'"

"Immoral ——! The people ain't so hypocritical about their dances as the folks back home—that's all, Big 'Un. Why—"

"And so you've got cattle plague over the border, eh?" Isaacs said slowly.

"Yes." Dixon relinquished the discussion of Miles with evident reluctance. "Got it bad—cattle dying by hundreds. They'll afraid it'll spread here and if it does—God help you; we can't. Won't be able to send you any men until we've got it in control over there. They've sent me to warn you and I've brought you some dope and needles—had to snitch 'em; there'll be —— to pay about that. However I'll look innocent and perhaps they won't suspect me."

"I vouldn't try to look like that, Dixon. You can't and they'll be sure to suspect you if you do— And you ain't going to stay and help me?"

Dixon shook his head.

"No. According to orders I ought to start back tonight. But I'm not going to. Man's got to sleep some time—and night's as good a time as any."

Isaacs sighed.

"Ah vell! Maybe we von't get the plague over here."

"You know better," Dixon said flatly. "We can keep infected cattle from crossing over—but we can't stop buffalo. They're already here, you say, probably came from an infected district. You may be able to keep cattle away from the buffalo, but how are you going to keep the fly—which came with 'em—away from the cattle?"

"I don't know," Isaacs said bitterly. "But maybe the missioner knows some prayers vot'll do the trick."

Dixon laughed.

"Well, find out what they are and tell me. If he knows a prayer what'll stop a tsetse fly from biting, I'll go on my knees from here to Salisbury, saying the prayer all the way.

"And now, for ——'s sake go and have your bath and let's eat!"

MILES awoke early the morning after the buffalo hunt feeling low in mind and strangely dispirited. He dressed hastily, carelessly and, going into the skoff hut, sat down to the breakfast his cook boy set before him.

He sipped a little of the coffee, toyed with the food and then, pushing his chair back with a move of disgust, rose, left the hut and sat where the full rays of the morning sun could beat down upon him.

He shivered violently; his teeth chattered—

He looked proudly at the large mission church the people of the district had recently erected and complacently took all credit for its building to himself—as if he had put every stone in place, had driven every nail. He looked out across the broad valley—wondering vaguely at the purple haze which dimmed his vision—and in his mind's eye saw the many kraals which were hidden from the material eye by the luxuriant foliage; he thought of the people inhabitating those kraals—from Macombe, the chief, down to the last-born, howling brat—and gloated because his efforts had saved them all from gross heathenism—

He thought of yesterday's trial—and muttered a boasting prayer of thanksgiving. The trial had been the final proof of his mission's success.

He tensed his muscles—endeavoring to check the violent fit of shivering which had ceased him—then immediately relaxed, finding the effort too fatiguing. His bones ached; a multitude of tiny hammers pounded at his temples—

Presently he took off his black coat—feeling uncomfortably hot. He moistened his parched lips—

He had done everything himself—everything. Isaacs had tried to thwart him at every turn; had even, he reflected bitterly, tried to take from him the glory of shooting a buffalo—

Good old Big 'Un. What a splendid chap he was. What would he do without him! How jealous he was—how the little Jew tried to thwart him! Quite natural, too, come to think of it—

Miles closed his eyes and opening them—immediately he thought—saw the native Cuntete standing before him.

He took the scrap of paper the native handed him—nearly dropped it from his nerveless fingers—and read:

DEAR MISSIONER:
What did I tell you? Have a look at Cuntete's tongue. I'm sorry about this.
ISAACS.

Miles looked wearily at the native.

"Stand still," he snapped irritably. "Don't sway about."

"No, *umfundisi*," the native said stolidly—he had not moved.

"Put out your tongue," Miles ordered.

Cuntete obeyed and then fled from the missionary's wrath.

"Big 'Un's laughing at me," Miles muttered, returning shakily to his seat after an ineffectual attempt to catch Cuntete. "He encourages the people in their superstitions; he's working against me. But this is nothing, a minor set-back, a mere fly-bite compared to what I have actually accomplished. The church—"

He glanced toward it and then groaned. The building seemed to dissolve before his fevered vision.

Yellow lights in a purple haze floated before his eyes—

A few minutes later he was being put to bed by the mission servants, raving in the delirium of malaria.

ABOUT the same time Isaacs, the storekeeper, was busily infecting certain of his cattle, with the virus brought to him by Dixon. Later—in a very little while—when they had succumbed to the fatal disease, he would take their distended gall-bladders from them and with the bile they contained commence the stupendous task of inoculating all the cattle in the district. He hoped by this to check the deadly ravages of the fly.

Even as he worked a native messenger came running to him with the word that cattle were mysteriously ill in a near-by kraal.

"Almighty God!" Big 'Un Isaacs said prayerfully, "vot a work you do."

Taking rifle and a large supply of cartridges, he hastened to the stricken kraal. The headman—dumb with the misery of helpless, hopeless resignation—took him to the place where the cattle were herded.

Some were already down, their heaving sides unnaturally distended; others stood listlessly about, staring with dull, apathetic eyes, bellowing with pain, discharging from the nostrils—

"They must all die," Isaacs said sadly. He loaded his rifle.

"The sick *and* the well, Great-Heart?" the headman asked.

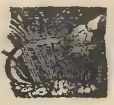
"There are no well, headman," Isaacs replied. "But because of these—others may live."

He found some slight consolation in the thought that there was no need now for him to wait for the disease to develop in his own cattle. Here there would be bile a-plenty. He sighed—ordered the men of the kraal to surround the cattle and so prevent them from stampeding—put his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

"My life goes with them," wailed the headman. "I can not see them die!"

He ran blindly to his hut, entered it and squatting in the darkest corner, covered his head with his blanket and willed himself to die.

The crisp clean-sounding reports of Isaacs' rifle impinged but faintly on his ear-drums—



TO SOME men—puny weaklings as well as strong, active ones—malaria is no more than a petty annoyance; a slight disorder which passes from them in a night. They run a slight temperature, have the suggestions of a headache, miss one meal—rarely more than two—and on the morrow boast that malaria is no more than a bilious attack.

But to other men—strong, active ones as well as puny weaklings—the mosquito-induced fever is a major illness; a week or more of erratic temperatures and then, the fever gone, days of listless convalescence, of moodiness, nostalgia; of almost suicidal fits of depression.

It affected Miles that way.

Because of the germ planted in his body by a tiny winged insect, his strength left him over night; reduced him to a wan, hollow-eyed, shaking invalid; a man who looked upon the world through jaundiced eyes; who had lost all sense of values; who was irrational, illogical, in thought and deed.

He had run up against one of Africa's trivial things—a mosquito-bite which had not left a mark on his sun-toughened skin—and found that it had inducted into his system the germ of defeat and death.

Fifteen days passed before he was strong enough to sit up in bed and eat sparingly of the food his thoughtful, anxious servants had prepared for him.

Not wishing to worry him and so retard his recovery, they told him—in answer to his listless inquiries regarding the mission in particular, and the district in general—that everything was progressing well and drew upon their fertile imaginations to depict the grief the people of the district displayed at his sickness.

He was content with that; as a matter of fact his interest had passed with the asking of the questions.

Two more weeks passed before he was able to leave his hut and attempt to take some interest in life again. His boys viewed his recovery with something akin to alarm and, after attempting to persuade him to stay still longer in the quiet of his hut, vanished quickly to their huts.

He entered the church and found the pews covered with dust—found dust everywhere. As he walked slowly down the aisle, clouds of it rose from under his shuffling feet, almost choking him.

He sat down in one of the chairs he had bought with the fines Isaacs had paid for cursing. It collapsed under him. Though, outwardly, it appeared firm and strong, white ants had attacked it, had eaten away its substance.

Shaken in mind and body he rose and, finding a vague unrest where he had expected peace, anxious to get away from the dusty gloom which pervaded the place, he went outside into the sunlight.

"Samuel!" he called and leaned breathlessly against the wall of the church, finding it hold firm while all the earth revolved rapidly about him.

A native suddenly appeared before him; he had been in close attendance on his master.

"You are still weak, *umfundisi*," he said chidingly; as if he were reproving a little child. "You have walked too far."

Miles waved his hand impatiently.

"I am strong now, Samuel. I have been weak too long. How many days have I been ill?"

"Nearly three times the count of the fingers of my two hands, *umfundisi*."

"And there have been no services during that time?"

"None, *umfundisi*. None came to worship. They—"

"Why?" Miles interrupted sharply.

"They all had work to do—men, women and children. They could not come. I, too, had work to do. Great-Heart, the storekeeper, gave orders—we, we black ones had to obey. A great evil has come upon the land, *umfundisi*—"

Miles imperiously motioned for silence. He wanted to think; to discover the causation of all this.

So Big 'Un had waited his time; had waited until he was ill and then had struck at the roots of his work. He—

"Did the storekeeper come to see me while I was sick, Samuel?" he asked suddenly.

"No, *umfundisi*. Twice he sent messengers asking you to go and see him, saying he was greatly occupied with work. And that was true; he—"

Miles did not hear that.

"And you sent answer back?"

"Aye, *umfundisi*. I said you could not come."

"No more, no less?"

"No more, no less, *umfundisi*."

Miles nodded.

"I would not have gone in any case," he muttered.

His brows knit in troubled thought; he had lost the power to think orderly. Unwanted thoughts flashed into his mind and out again with bewildering speed. His brain cells were in a chaotic state, atrophied by the long days of disuse.

His hands trembled; his nostrils twitched; the tear ducts of his eyes seemed as if they must burst into a never ceasing flood. He silently cursed his weakness; cursed the man who had trampled his friendship, his faith, in the mire. Thoughts came to him of Isaacs' goodness, of the help the little man had given him; of the things the little man had made possible—he discarded them all as dream-like fantasies.

But he mustn't think of Isaacs; Isaacs, the man who had betrayed his friendship—

* * *

WHAT else was it he wanted to ask Samuel. Something about Isaacs? About the people to whom he had given so freely of his loving kindness—had outpoured for them the milk of loving kindness—

Milk! That was it. He laughed triumphantly. He had succeeded over his brain; had made it work for him.

"Why did you give me condensed milk this morning," he asked peevishly.

He seemed to wait ages for the answer.

"We have no oxen, no cows, *umfundisi*. The storekeeper gave orders that they were to be killed. And so—"

Samuel shrugged his shoulders then stepped quickly back and dodged as if to avoid a blow. Miles' appearance frightened him.

The missionary's blue eyes flashed with an insane light; the bones of his face seemed to protrude through his ashen skin, the unkempt red thatch of his hair—flaring upward—seemed to assume an even more belligerent tint. At that instant he became as unreasoning, as dangerous, as cruel as any of the religious fanatics who have left a bloody trail on the pages of history.

The last vestige of fever weakness left him. He was strong—strength sufficient for the task had been bestowed upon him.

"Saddle my horse and bring it here," he ordered in a queer, stilted voice.

"But the *umfundisi* is still sick," Samuel said. "He is not strong enough to ride. The—"

"Obey!" Miles thundered and advanced threateningly.

Samuel gasped and ran to the stable, telling the mission servants who crowded about him that the *umfundisi* had gone mad.

Miles, the expression on his face grimly implacable, went into his hut, buckled on his cartridge-belt, oiled the breech of his gun.

"He was more to me than my right hand or my right eye," he muttered and then intoned in a high, nasal voice:

" 'And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee—And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off and cast it from thee—' "

At the patter of hoofs and the jingle of bit, he rushed outside, mounted the horse Samuel had led to the door and rode swiftly away.

He was entirely controlled by one impulse—to cut off and cast away the man who was endangering the soul of the community; who was causing the people to stumble back into the ways of heathenism.

The thunder of his horse's hoofs on the hard, sun-baked trail seemed to drum into his brain the command:

"Kill Big 'Un Isaacs. Kill Big 'Un Isaacs. Kill—"

He passed groups of natives, but did not see them or hear their tired greetings.

Had he been his normal self he would have found many things to give him cause for thought—the large fire which blazed in the midst of one corn patch, polluting the air with the odor of burning flesh, hides and bones; the bloated, disintegrating carcass of a buffalo on the edge of the swamp farther on—his horse shied violently at it; the absence of grazing cattle; the silent forms which dotted the veld; the presence of a multitude of vultures; the all-pervading stench of death.

But he saw nothing, heard nothing, smelled nothing.

He was simply the instrument of an inward voice which continually urged him to "kill—that the people may live."

On approaching, at last, the foot of the hill—Big 'Un Isaacs' hill—he was stopped by two natives armed with assegais.

"It is forbidden to pass this way, *umfundisi.*"

He glared at them.

"Who forbids it?"

"Great-Heart. He—"

Miles uttered a loud cry of rage and spurred his horse forward.

The warriors leaped back just in time to escape being ridden down and ran after him, shouting angry threats.

Easily outdistancing them, he came presently upon a small cattle kraal; a number of natives stood at its opening, gazing open-mouthed at what was happening within.

One of them, Miles saw—and nodded contentedly—was holding Isaacs' horse.

Turning off the trail into the bush, the missionary circled around the kraal until he came on to the path again, leading up the hill. From that point of vantage, by standing up in the stirrups, he could look into the place—looked and gasped with angry dismay.

He saw Isaacs, wearing the regalia of a witch-doctor of the tribe and accompanied by a number of native witch-doctors, catch and hobble an ox; he saw a long knife flash in Isaacs' hand—saw it plunge into the body of the beast, reaching down to its heart.

He heard thes tricken animal's death bellow—saw its struggling fall.

He passed his hands wearily before his eyes.

When he looked again Isaacs' assistants had turned the beast over on its back; one of them was making a long incision in its belly; then stepped back, giving place to Isaacs who plunged his arm—up to the shoulder—into the incision and groped amongst the smoking, reeking entrails.

Miles was suddenly conscious that the

others were singing—a wild, heathenish chant—an appeal to the great god, Kabula Kaggorra—to look favorably upon their wonder-working.

MILES dropped back into his saddle and covered his eyes with his hands. He was trembling as with fever; the intensity of his angry passion sickened him.

Again he forced himself to look and saw that Isaacs had left the cattle kraal and was mounting his horse. Miles heard him shout some final orders to his blood-smeared assistants. They were, Miles saw, pouring the contents of the dead beast's gall bladder into a stone jar:

"Brewing some hellish drug," he muttered.

A moment later he saw Isaacs ride slowly forward, saw him turn into the trail and then pass from sight.

In a few minutes, a very few minutes, he would round the bend in the trail, and then—

Miles dismounted; his fumbling fingers plucked cartridges from his belt; he loaded the magazine of his rifle. Then he rested his gun barrel on the branch of a near-by bush and waited.

All his movements had been slow, deliberate; it was as if he obeyed some dimly heard, faintly understood, commands.

A look of indecision was on his face.

And then Isaacs rode into view around the bend in the trail some sixty yards away and Miles, his bloodless lips closed in a firm, hard line, fired; fired again.

Isaacs' horse plunged madly then went down in a heap, struggled, regained its feet and galloped away—snorting with pain and terror, head high in air, blood streaming from a wound in its chest.

Isaacs, lying face downward in the dust, did not move.

Miles stared at him. An exultant cry of triumph trembled unvoiced upon his lips.

Something—a tight cord which seemed to be pressing about his temples—snapped; the red mists which had dimmed his vision cleared.

"Big 'Un!" he cried. "Big 'Un!" and ran to the little storekeeper.

Isaacs sat up as he neared, his face contorted with pain, gingerly fingering his leg—lifting it with his hands and moving it experimentally.

"Big 'Un!" Miles exclaimed again as he kneeled in the dust beside the storekeeper.

He put his arm about the storekeeper's shoulders, supporting him. The blood and gore of the dead beast which was spattered all over the leopard-skin Isaacs wore, left a dullish stain on Miles' dark coat.

Isaacs looked up at him, as if seeing him for the first time. He was not wearing his glasses and he blinked short-sightedly.

"Vot a funny fellow you are, Missioner," he said with a tired chuckle. "Vot did you think I vas? A buffalo—eh?"

"I'm a murderer, Big 'Un," Miles said solemnly and tried to examine Isaacs' injured leg.

"Hi, ——!" the little man yelled. "You leave that alone—it's broken. That fool horse stumbled and rolled on me. The—"

"It wasn't his fault, Big 'Un," Miles said hurriedly, breathlessly. "I shot him—I tried to shoot you—"

"But vhy?" Isaacs asked incredulously.

Miles seemed not to hear him.

"I'm a murderer," he moaned. "I—"

Isaacs chuckled again.

"But I ain't dead, Missioner, so vhy call yourself oogly names? You look sick. Vhy? It's my leg, not yours, vot's hurt. Vot a funny feller you are. Here. You get some boys to carry me up to the store. This ain't no place to talk—an' I've got a lot to say. I—"

But the little man, his strength sapped by the days of unending toil, anxieties and heavy responsibilities, could not combat the pain of his broken leg any longer and he dropped into the merciful oblivion of unconsciousness.

Natives came running in response to Miles' frantic calls. With their help the missionary constructed a stretcher.

A few minutes later they were carrying Isaacs up the steep hill to his store, Miles walking miserably beside him, his finger on the storekeeper's pulse, watching him anxiously.

"VOT a fool you are, Missioner; vot a fool I am, an', oy! Don't I feel sorry for the both of us."

Isaacs, his leg set and expertly bandaged by Miles, was lying in bed, eating with evident relish the food which Miles had insisted on preparing with his own hands.

The missionary nodded wearily.

"Yes, I know I'm a fool—and worse. If

my hand hadn't shaked I'd have been a murderer—"

"Forget that, Missioner," Isaacs said curtly, "that vasn't you—that vas fever mist; that vas Africa. That's forgotten."

"I can't forget," Miles said. "And I'm a fool—you're not."

Isaacs nodded.

"I am, Missioner. Vhen I sent vord for you to come an' see me and vord came back that you couldn't—I thought it vas because you were mad about something; about the vay I laughed at your trial, or about the vay I sent Cuntete to you, or about the vay I hit you and ran off after you had shot the buffalo."

"I didn't shoot the buffalo, Big 'Un—you did. And you saved my life. Funny I couldn't see things properly before."

"Never mind that," Isaacs said hurriedly. "It vas all fever mist, I tell you. Vell—vot vas I saying? Oh! I thought you vouldn't come to see me because you vas mad; an' so I got mad, too, an' vouldn't have come to see you even if I had had time—an' I didn't, Missioner. But I vould have come if I'd have known you had fever. I know how bad you get it. Did your boys take care of you properly?"

Miles nodded.

"Very well, Big 'Un. You trained them—they were yours before they were mine."

Isaacs shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, vell. And there you vas—down with fever—an' me thinking I'd teach you a lesson by not telling you things, an' getting madder an' madder because you didn't come to find out things— An' now look at vot a —— of a mess we're in! Ain't it ——?"

He looked quickly at the missionary and sighed softly when the curses went unreproved.

"An' it's all my fault; it's all because I got mad an' didn't come to see you. Ain't I a fool? And ain't it ——?"

A faint smile lighted up Miles' gloomy face.

"I heard you the first time, Big 'Un," he said. "And—but still I don't understand things. Why—"

"Don't you know nothing?" Isaacs interrupted sharply.

"Nothing," Miles replied wearily. "I've been living in a black haze, surrounded by gloomy thoughts. I know nothing except the little Samuel told me this morning. I only know that the people haven't been to worship because you gave them work to do; I only know that you ordered all the mission cattle to be killed— And then I see you dressed like a witch-doctor performing some hellish rite—and—I'd rather see you dead than turned black, Big 'Un."

"——!" Isaacs muttered softly. "No vonder you vanted to kill me." Then, aloud:

"Listen, Missioner: We've got the cattle plague bad. The fly brought it—maybe the buffalo brought the fly, but that's no never mind. The fly's here an' cattle have been dying by hundreds—hundreds, Missioner. Oy! The poor dumb beasts! Didn't you smell the stink of them, Missioner? No matter. I have. It's a yeller smell, Missioner; yeller mixed vith blood-red. An' I've been riding about the district night an' day; talking to the people—they're as frightened of the plague as little children of noises in the dark—inoculating, killing, getting bile from dead beasts to do more inoculating. ——, Missioner. I dream of yeller bile. There have been times vhen I'd have sold my soul—vot little soul I got—for a hogshead of bile vithout having to cut open a beast to get it. Oy! I'll never eat steak again!

"It's this part of the district got the plague vorst. It broke out here an' I've kept it here pretty nearly. I've made 'em isolate and quarantine—

"An' it's been hard vork, Missioner, making the people see things my vay. It's a vonder they didn't kill me; they vanted to, I know. They don't understand sickness, or death, except as something sent as a punishment by the great spirits. They couldn't see vhy, because one beast in a herd vas sick, all the rest vould be sick—vould have to be killed before they breathed the sickness into the beasts of another herd. They couldn't see how the stuff taken from the gall of a sick beast could stop a vell one from getting sick. Vhy should they? That's big witchcraft—not? But I'm ridin' on top now—" He added under his breath, "At least I vas until my horse came a cropper vith me."

"What a fool I am," Miles wailed. "Will I ever learn? Will I always act like a spoiled child, imagining the sun is forever extinguished just because a little cloud passes before it?"

Isaacs laughed—a high, teetering laugh

which was infinitely more in keeping with his puny body than the bull-like bellow of his voice.

"Vot a funny fellow you are, Missioner," he said softly. "Vot's that you're spouting —poetry?"

Miles ignored the banter.

"And you've done all this alone, Big 'Un?"

"Couldn't get no outside help, Missioner. They've got the plague there, too. Dixon—he sends me needles whenever he can pinch 'em. An' that seems often; he ain't a very law-abiding man for a policeman, is he? But it's a good job he sends 'em. They break easily, Missioner, the needles do—especially vhen your hands get tired an' you're ready to vomit vith the stench of it all.

"BUT sure! I've had some help. I got the old lady, Quarre Quate, on my side. Her and Chief Macombe. Couldn't do anything vithout their help. They made the vitch-doctors help me. An' they made me a vitch-doctor, too—the boss of 'em all. Sure! Vhy not? And I had to do everything according to the rules of vitchcraft. An' that the —— of it, Missioner. The people von't let anybody but me inoculate their beasts; an' they don't think the medicine 'll do any good unless I take it vith the proper fixings—like you saw today.

"And now—here I am, can't move; and there's still more cattle to inoculate—there ain't no end to it—an' if I ain't on hand to ride round and see the cattle ain't allowed to graze joost anyvhere, everything'll be —— up again.

"They're joost like kids, these people. They don't believe their cattle are sick until they're dead. You have to be after them all the time."

Isaacs sighed wearily.

"Ah vell," he continued, "the rest'll have to die—that's all there is to it. But ain't it ——, Missioner?"

Miles nodded.

There was silence for a little while. Miles, his chin resting on the palm of his hands, gazed steadily before him, endeavoring to marshal the flood of thoughts which crowded into his brain. Isaacs, lying back on his pillow, his eyes half closed, their lids veiling the sharp challenge which flashed in them, waited anxiously.

"Big 'Un," Miles said presently, speaking softly, tentatively. "I—" He stopped, not quite sure of himself.

Isaacs' eyes closed.

"Big 'Un," the missionary began again; louder, more assured.

Isaacs opened his eyes and looked full at him.

"Yah, Missioner?"

"I've been a blind fool— No—don't interrupt and say it was fever. Maybe it was fever, but the thoughts must have been there before the fever came and I don't want any more excuses made for me.

"Because I was a blind fool, a criminal fool, I've endangered your work; because of me, you're confined here, helpless, and because of that a lot of cattle are going to die—cattle which you could have saved—cattle which are the people's health."

He paused, moistening his lips.

"Vell?" Isaacs queried softly. "Vell, Missioner?"

"Can't I take your place, Big 'Un. Can't I—"

"You talk foolish, Missioner," Isaacs interrupted harshly. "Vot do you know about cattle? You never cut vun up; you don't know how to take out the gall-bladder. You don't know how to inoculate."

"If you told me how to do it," Miles said meekly, "I would try to follow instructions. I would follow instructions. I would come to you here and report every day and—"

"You'd faint at the stink of it all, Missioner."

"I would not," Miles said stoutly. "And if I did—I should recover. Let me do it, Big 'Un—for my soul's sake."

"Vot a man!" Isaacs said reproachfully. "Thinking about your soul! But don't be a fool, Missioner. You're weak with fever. You couldn't do it; you ain't got the strength."

"I will find strength; it will be given to me."

"Mebbe," Isaacs muttered doubtfully. "Mebbe if you had plenty of red steaks before you get sick of the smell of beef; an' if you had plenty of eggs and good port every day—mebbe that vould build up you. Mebbe you could do it." Then he shook his head. "But it ain't possible, Missioner. Think of it—shooting suffering beasts—blood-stink! You ain't the type of man to stand it. Your nerves are too high strung. Listen."

He painted a particularly nauseating

word picture of some of the tasks he had had to perform; dilating on their gruesome, bloody details.

Miles did not flinch.

"Remembering the end to which I was working— I could do all that, too, Big 'Un. What's that compared to a hundred head of cattle saved?"

"That's better, Missioner," Isaacs chuckled and a light of triumph came into his eyes. "You ain't talking of saving souls now, are you? So, maybe you could do it. Only—you'd have to do it as I did it. You'd have to do everything properly. You'd have to be a witch-doctor."

He looked keenly at Miles.

That man was visibly shaken.

"That's not necessary, surely, Big 'Un," he protested faintly. "That would be disloyal to my mission; that would give the lie to all my teachings; would—"

"It vouldn't," Isaacs shouted savagely. "And if it vould—vot matter. Who told you that your religion, or mine, or any other, vas better than the one the people have got? Vill your God, or my God, stop the plague? Or is it the inoculation that vill stop it?"

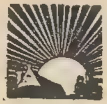
Miles was silent.

"Oy!" Isaacs continued softly. "I didn't ought to get mad an' shout like that, Missioner. But vot does the outward things matter? Vot does it matter vether you vear a surplice, or a cap an' gown, or the leopard skin of a vitch-doctor vhen you inoculate the beasts? And vords? Vot do vords matter? Meaningless heathen jargon, you say? Sure! Vot of it? If it's meaningless to you an' to the people—vot does it matter? I vunce heard two big doctors— Oy! Their charge vas high!—talking about vot vas the the matter vith me. I didn't know vot they said—it meant nothing to me; an' the prescription they gave me—that meant nothing, neither. But I took it to a dispenser and had it made up and took the medicine vot he handed me. Oy! I took it with all the faith these people show in charms. Yet, by an' by, another specialist told me the first vuns vas all wrong an'—"

He talked on and on, affecting not to notice the strained look on Miles' face, inwardly praying that his friend was big enough to measure up to the opportunity.

"I'll do it," Miles burst out presently, nearly choking on the words. "I think—" he spoke slowly, feeling his way, trying to convince himself—"I think the end is greater than my personal faith. I will do it —I will do penance.

"Now tell me what I must do. Tell me all I ought to know."



AT SUNRISE the following morning Miles, the missionary, rode down to the cattle-kraal at the foot of the hill. Isaacs' servants escorted him, shouting his praises, paying him extravagant homage.

He was naked save for a leopard skin about his shoulders and a goat-skin loincloth. Two distended bladders were fastened to his head; they bobbed fantastically to the rocking gait of his horse. Around his neck hung many gruesome charms and a necklace of snakes' fangs and human teeth. His face was hideously smeared with red paint. In his right hand he carried a long, keen-bladed sacrificial knife.

He stared fixedly before him; in his eyes was the triumphant look of a martyr.

At the cattle kraal he was met by a number of native witch-doctors.

They looked at him suspiciously until Isaacs' servants shouted in chorus:

"This one is great. Greater than all others. At his name—it must not be whispered—the whole earth shakes. He has taken to himself the leopard skin of Great-Heart—see it! Hear him, you wise ones. Hear him and obey."

The others crowded about him then, seeking instructions.

"More medicine must be prepared," he intoned in a high, nasal voice, "and over it I will say a charm which will make it more powerful than all medicines."

He dismounted and led the way into the cattle-kraal. They followed him, silent, awed by the majesty of his pose and the spiritual light which shone from his eyes. Truly the hand of the Great Spirits was upon him. They captured a sick beast and dragged it up to him.

He stood silently beside it, his head bowed, feeling with his left hand for that vital spot at which Isaacs had instructed him to direct his blow. His lips moved continually—

Presently he nodded—he had found the spot; his assistants thought he nodded in response to a voice they could not hear. His right hand flashed aloft; the knife glistened in it.

"Kabula Kagorra," he cried, calling upon his God in a foreign tongue. "From this beast let medicine pour forth to charm this evil away."

He held that pose for a breathless moment, looking up at the knife, looking beyond it to the eternal skies.

The witch-doctors murmured with awe. Kabula Kagorra was being worshipped with all the mystery that was dear to their souls. The *umfundisi* was all-wise—wiser, even, than Great-Heart.

With a loud, piercing cry, Miles brought the knife flashing downward, plunged it into the beast at the vital spot. Blood gushed out and warmed his icy fingers.

The beast dropped like a stone—bellowed once and then was still.

Quickly the witch-doctors turned it over and made an incision in its belly. They stood back then that their new leader might do the thing appointed.

Miles stooped over and groped in the steaming mess with his two hands.

He closed his eyes and swayed slightly.

"Au-a!" murmured the others. This was the greatest of all mysteries!

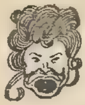
With a superhuman effort Miles fought off the feeling of faintness. Strength came back to him and with it the consciousness that the course he had resolved to follow was the right one.

He opened his eyes and used them to direct the search of his groping hands.

A few minutes later, holding the gall bladder containing the precious bile in his two hands high above his head, holding it as if it contained some holy mystery, he walked slowly to the jars which were to hold the bile.

The look of martyrdom had vanished from his eyes; replacing it was the look of a happy, determined man who had a sacred mission to perform and was resolved to let nothing obstruct his path.

As he walked he intoned the hymn of supplication to Kabula Kaggora—the Great God.



AND Isaacs, when his boys brought him word of all this, smiled contentedly and forgot the pain of his broken leg. He knew that the fight he had begun would be carried forward to a triumphant conclusion; he knew that Miles', his friend's, victory over himself meant that he would be henceforth a strong power in the land; he knew that Miles, by leading the fight against the plague, by forgetting all differences of race and creed, was rebuilding his mission on so strong a foundation that neither fire, nor flood, famine nor fly—Isaacs smiled at that—could destroy it.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THEY come every little while, these letters from those whose bodies can no longer take the trail but whose hearts all the world can not keep from adventuring. Their seats are always reserved for them at Camp-Fire—the best seats the rest of us can find. If we offer them no words of sympathy it is because we know it is not sympathy they want. But we try to offer them understanding. And they are not only members of Camp-Fire but the very heart and spirit of Camp-Fire. We need them.

Toledo, Ohio.

Camp-Fire: Well, here I am comrades—at last! I've been wanting to join the circle for years but when I read some of your letters and realize how much more you have seen and done it makes me feel like an interloper—although in my short span of twenty-nine years I have been to places, and experienced more of raw crawling life than some men do in a lifetime.

I READ my first copy of *Adventure* aboard the old *U. S. S. Kearsarge.* No excuse for writing other than I like you. It sends a warm thrill through my blood when I read your letters and recognize the place, sometimes the incident, and I try to bring your faces before me in the hopes that I might know you.

My days of wandering, "for to behold and for to see," are all over. A blood-mad "Boche"—may his warrior's soul rest in peace—very effectually ended it for me. I've been to Mexico, to most of the Islands and quite a few of the South Americas. I've "hiked" over most of France and been to England and Germany, and I've seen dead men—too many of them.

It's funny, and beautiful too, how that madness of youth will keep haunting a man when he knows that his day is done. Sometimes the urge is so strong that I feel as though I will go mad when I realize that the trails are all closed to me; that all there is left for me is to enjoy them at second hand through the pages of *Adventure*.

That's all I guess—"'stoo" much already. And in closing may I give a man's toast to you of the closed trails and to you of the dim trails?—To any man, whatever his color may be, as long as he is a man. And to the Gods of battles, of men's souls, and to the red gods of the faraway waste places where adventures are still in the making. *Adios.*—ETHAN E. HARRIS, JR.

* * *

NOPE, I won't even print it. I tried hard to believe in the cow-milking snake and had to give it up, but I refuse even to make a try on the cow-milking fish. Bass, too! But even if the comrade's newspaper clipping can't get by—it was supposed to have happened near Hagerstown, Md.—his own letter is good hearing, and he doesn't vouch for that fish tale anyhow. (It gave the owner's name—Samuel Boyd—and the names of two witnesses. The cows just waded into the river and—but here! I've got to stop.)

His letter is really concerned with telling how a "one-man dog" can be raised:

Cincinnati, Ohio.

While I suppose you have heard of the enclosed news item I am sending it in as the "cow-milking fish" ought to have his place with the "cow-milking snake."

HAVE been a reader of Camp-Fire since you heaved on the first log and especially enjoy the snake and queer "critter" discussions. I don't laugh any too loud at any of the yarns, as just recently I was "razzed" for saying something about the dogs often "treeing" ground-hogs and shaking 'em out, sometimes twenty or thirty feet above the ground. Also been trying for a year to make certain folks believe I saw a tame rabbit pick up a small chicken in its mouth and carry it about ten feet. Had a witness, too, but believe he's done double crossed me and won't even admit he was on the ground when it happened.

SOME time ago a comrade asked how to raise a "one-man dog." I thought many of the crowd would write in, but do not recall having seen his inquiry replied to.

Here is a stunt he can try, but be sure he wants a "one-man dog" before he starts.

Take a puppy and after he is four months old do not let any one touch him or feed him but the owner. I suggest, however, he let the rest of the family in on the deal.

At about ten to fourteen months the puppy ought to show considerable dislike to having any one handle him or to follow strangers. My experience has been that it is harder to do this with hunting-dogs than other breeds, due to their tendency to follow a gun. However, I recall two large fox-hounds that I raised as one-man dogs that were splendid examples of one-man loyalty. One was broken for coon, and strange lanterns, shooting or a bunch of mouthy trailers had no effect on him, let alone mixing with strange people.

Have tried the one-man stunt with great Danes, airedales, Irish terriers and fox-hounds, and believe it will work with most breeds the majority of times tried. I would like to advise the comrade, however, that there may be some disadvantages in this matter. Would not recommend it for town dogs or where you have a great many strangers around. Often this sort of handling gets a dog into trouble. Some visitor may pet him and get away with it and then maybe they wont. If you have to continually caution folks not to handle him, he may get a bad reputation. It is largely the temperament of the puppy and a matter of experiment.

Hope this rather rough outline will prove of interest to our inquiring comrade and now I'll crawl back in the "lean-to" and give some one else a chance at "the Fire."—HERB. R. WUNDER.

* * *

A LETTER from our cache, dating clear back to December, 1920. Harold Lamb and all archers, take particular notice:

Rouge River, Oregon.

In the mountains beyond Tsu, one of the gateways in the "Great Wall," there is a white race, blue-eyed and fair-haired. They live under their own chief in semi-feudal style and are such tremendous scrappers that "John" trembles at their mere name, but they are gradually exterminating themselves in intertribal warfare. Some years ago China despatched an army to subdue them. The General decided, when he got within three days' march of the enemies' country, that it was a good healthy place to camp, but when he had done so for about a week, one of his aides was missing and the wily old bird began to advance, but not rapidly. Just as he got in touch with the enemy another general came along with orders to take command and send No. 1 to Pekin chop-chop.

He was at once tried on the accusation that he was afraid to fight, made by the missing aide, but was too cute to be caught that way, and testified that his men were dead beat with long marching and it was necessary that they should be rested so as to be full of pep when they met the enemy. He was burning to get at 'em, and so soon as his men were fit he led them forward and was about to grind the foe into the earth when he was superseded. He had influence and money and was acquitted, but the aide who was in the pay of No. 2, who in the meantime had been crushingly defeated, was forthwith beheaded.

TSU is on the caravan route to India, a trade that has gone on so long that the origin of the caravaners is unknown. They, too, though dark-eyed, are lighter than Chinese. A caravan consists of many carts and sometimes several hundred men, women and children. They carry spears and bows and also the latest firearms, these latter they use if attacked when they go into laager, from which nothing but artillery would shift them. To economize ammunition they use the primitive weapons for killing game. A friend of mine tried one of their bows and, although he could stretch it, could, much to their amusement, only send the arrow 50 yards or so. Two of the caravaners, having put up a mark, jumped on their ponies and, as they passed it at 80 yards going at a hand gallop, they each struck the center, the arrows sticking side by side deep in the wood. My friend said—

"I always thought the stories of Robin Hood and the old English archers all bunk, but since I saw that I can swallow them like a lamb."

Wishing all Camp-Firers a happy New Year.—J. S. TAYLOR.

* * *

HAVING read the book referred to, I am more than ready to vouch for Fairfax Downey's quotations from it in the following letter and for his use of "local color" in his story in this issue. What becomes of the glamour and romance of doublet-and-hose tales of the grand dames and elegant gentlemen of the French courts up to that of Louis the Grand Monarch when we gaze upon the true picture of "things as they really was?"

One court rule of etiquette that appealed particularly to me as vivid, even dramatic, and just possibly picturesque reads that you "must not pound a bone upon the table to extract the marrow." When you consider that the "Civilities, the books of etiquette of those days, were written, not for the very much unwashed general public, but for the elite, the royalty and high nobility of the resplendent court of the nation they looked up to as the glass of fashion for all western Europe, well, what must have been the personal habits and condition of the mere populace in more benighted countries?

The setting for "The Knight of the Three Tines," Paris of the early eighteenth century, needs a foreword of explanation. Not unnaturally sceptical readers are likely to accuse me of drawing a longer bow than any mentioned in the archery discussions in Camp-Fire. I refer them to Tighe Hopkins' series of papers collected under the title, "An Idler in Old France," to which I am mainly indebted for that setting. The book is out of print but is available in libraries.

MARSHALLING Brantôme, M. Franklin and other authorities, Mr. Hopkins limns a picture of the chief city of France calculated to make us who accept our modern sanitation as a matter of course believe that it was indeed "a place scarcely possible to live in." The terrible pestilences had ceased their periodical ravages and the city was steadily becoming worthier of its renown, thanks to the efforts of La Reynie, chief of police. Streets were being paved, sewers arched and so forth, but filth and stenches pervaded all quarters of the city and each citizen was limited to two quarts of aqueduct water a day, plus such as he might venture to use or drink from the polluted Seine.

Commenting on personal cleanliness, Mr. Hopkins quotes this avowal of the charming and intelligent Queen Margaret of Navarre to her lover: "Look at these lovely hands of mine; they have not been washed for eight days, yet I will wager they outshine yours." And he points out what a surface veneer was the elegance of the much-vaunted Court of Louis XIV. There was a great plenitude of punctilio and rules of precedence, but table manners were a caution!

Books of etiquette of the day seriously advised ladies and gentlemen against breaches of manners which would seem possible to none but savages. "High society" was hardly less guilty than the lower orders; certainly Louis Quatorze set no good example. The fork, at first proclaimed indecent, began its advance into favor in the seventeenth century and it was some years later before it approached a fairly general use. Diners were enjoined not to lick it nor the spoon which was to go back into a bowl after a serving. They were besought to make as little noise as possible about eating; begged not to use their napkins as pocket handkerchiefs or toothpicks—all these being exhortations to ladies and gentlemen of polish.

Nobody asked in those days, "What's wrong with this picture?" The answer was too easy. It was, "Almost everything."—FAIRFAX DOWNEY.

* * *

AN ERROR to be corrected. I haven't looked it up yet to see who was at fault. We'll follow the easiest course and just blame it on us here in the office.

National Home, Wisconsin.

Reference my letter to Mr. Pendexter, with enclosed letter from Indian War veteran, please note that in my letter I stated that I wrote to Mr. Pendexter reminding him of our previous correspondence while I was "*Chief Clerk* of the 101st Division," not *Chief* of that Division as it was published in Camp-Fire.

In order that my many friends of the Service may not think that I was trying to pose as something I was not, will you please correct the first part of my letter? I have destroyed my carbon copies, or mislaid them, and it may be that through haste I left out the word "Clerk." I think not however. I hate a poser!—HARRY R. BROWN.

* * *

AT OUR last Camp-Fire I mentioned the following letter from T. S. Stribling, held over because it betrayed in advance the ending of his story in the last issue. I haven't read either of the other stories to which he refers, but believe that Anatole France should be included along with the two writers mentioned. We are safe in taking it for granted that Mr. Stribling concurs in this, his conscience being entirely and justly at ease. There would be no more ground for suggesting plagiarizing on his part than on the part of any two of the other three. Nor would any proof of this be needed other than the terrific shock to which, as you will see, he was subjected.

When I wrote "A Passage to Benares," I first gave it this ending, beginning with the last paragraph:

"Turnkey," snapped Poggioli, with academic sharpness, "why didn't you come and tell me of old Chunda Chun's confession the moment he made it. What do you mean, keeping me locked up here when you know I am an innocent man!"

"You are not locked up, Mr. Poggioli," said the man patiently. "I'm a nurse. You're in a hospital; we've been doing everything we could to arouse you. You've been asleep three days."

Well, I thought that was pretty good, and then it just occurred to me, suppose they had hanged Poggioli, suppose he was dead, and the thing he saw was a disembodied spirit!

So with a confessed shudder I killed him; or rather, I had already killed him and didn't know it, because I was not apprized of the tragedy until after the fact. I tell you it's grewsome work, this meeting a man face to face, setting down his conversation, and then suddenly discovering he is dead. Nobody but a man with iron nerves should take to the writing game. There is no telling what he will run into.

I learned after I had written my story that Sir A. Conan Doyle had used the very same device to end a tale. I knew that Booth Tarkington sent one of his characters to heaven, and then abruptly discovered that he was in hell. I felt almost like apologizing to Mr. Tarkington for snitching his ending in this story, but now when I discover that I have Mr. Doyle's identical ending, anybody can imagine the confusion which overwhelms me. I can only repeat, "Nobody but a man with iron nerves should take to the writing game.—T. S. STRIBLING.

* * *

WE APPEALED to Camp-Fire to help us find Noel Stearn, who sent us a long poem but had moved on when we sent him a three-figure check for it. You'll remember he is no poet by profession—merely needed some money to grub-stake him for a try at some promising gold prospects he'd marked down in Northern British Columbia. Well, he found himself—we've just had a letter from him. He's been with a lumber prospect camp and writes, from another town in Michigan, mildly mentioning he hadn't got either the poem back or any pay for it.

Of course, he may be "lost" again, but the check has gone to his last address. No letter acknowledging its receipt, but at least our letter hasn't been returned unclaimed again.

FROM Hugh Pendexter some guide-posts to conditions in America in 1744-1748, the period of his five-part story beginning in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

Until this story, "Log Cabin Men," I have refrained from exploiting King George's War, as the only outstanding military achievement, the capture of Louisburg, was rendered null and void when the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle restored the fortress to France. Aside from the taking of Louisburg the war was marked by countless bloody raids on the New England borders, which, at first glance, determined nothing. However, now I am doubly impelled to tell something of that struggle: the stubbornness of the settlers to cling to their lands although almost constantly harrassed, and their indignation at the termination of the war, whereby Louisburg was restored.

While in itself the war may not present any pivotal hinge on which history swings, yet it becomes easily discernible that the Crown's indifference to the suffering of the northern colonies was one of the determining causes that led to the Revolutionary War. Independent of England's aid the New England fishermen, farmers and storekeepers conquered the Gibraltar of America. This aroused the spirit of self-dependence which was to culminate in the spirit of "Americanism." To this extent, at least, the bloody period of 1744-'48 is an important historical link.

IN NEW ENGLAND the war was commonly called "Shirley's War" because of the leading rôle played by Massachusetts' governor. He was one of the very few popular English governors in America. His father was a London merchant. Instead of going into trade he became a lawyer, located in London, and was familiar with the intrigues of the Court of George II. He came to America in 1731 and became governor of Massachusetts in 1741. Previous to his appointment he served as Surveyor of the King's Woods, and was quick to understand the value of our forests and especially the importance of reserving the choice pines for "masting" the royal navy. This work also gave him an extensive knowledge of the geography and resources of New England.

For fifteen years he was a royal governor and Military Commander in America, and almost constantly engaged in fighting the French and their Indian allies. He was one of the first, if not the first, royal governors to discern the supreme importance of the Crown's contributing to the colonial welfare if colonial loyalty was to continue. Aside from the military rôle he played during the old wars, he carried through many civic reforms. Chief among the latter was establishing Massachusetts on a specie basis, that colony being bankrupt when he took office as governor. He succeeded in securing compensation for the colony's expenses in George's War, and was successful in insisting the coin received should be used to redeem colonial paper. When assuming office the relative values of silver and paper were four to one. He received no aid from the Crown that his efforts deserved. There was no Pitt to speak for him and the colonies at Court. He endeavored to end the jealousies of the colonies and unite them for mutual defense and self-improvement. In this he was largely balked by the quarreling of Newcastle and Bedford, neither of whom gave any evidence of being well acquainted with, or interested in, the needs of the colonies.

Before and after being appointed governor he was much aided by his wife, Frances Shirley, whose family connections permitted her to use her influence with Newcastle, as her many letters show.

Had I been writing a story of Queen Anne's War I should have used "Dick" Hunniwell as a character. "Dresser" was suggested by him. He was an Injun-hater of the first water. During his absence the Indians killed his wife and child in a raid on the Scarborough settlement. From then on it was always war between Hunniwell and the Indians. Treaties were made and peace might reign, but none of this for Hunniwell. In a time of peace two Indians entered a clam-house at what is now Seavey's Landing. Hunniwell entered, picked up a gun and swept it around as if taking aim at a flock of birds. When the two heads were in line he fired and killed both. His gun he called the "Buccaneer." It must have been of very large bore, and he must have loaded it heavily with small balls, for it is said that with one discharge he killed five savages on the shore of Massacre Pond. He was attacked while mowing on the Scarborough marsh and decapitated a savage with one sweep of the scythe. After the Peace of Utrecht he was ambushed with nineteen other men by two hundred Indians near Massacre Pond and but one man escaped. Hunniwell and eighteen companions were buried in one grave. It is a peculiar fact that this common grave has never been located. Enough anecdotes and stories are told about Hunniwell to fill a large volume.

Another character I would have used was Charles Pine, a companion of Hunniwell. He usually carried two guns when hunting Indians and his audacity in attacking large bands made him much feared. Once he covered himself with seaweed near a garrison on Winnock's Neck and waited until the savages appeared to threaten the defense. At an opportune moment he fired and killed, threw off the seaweed and was inside the stockade before the Indians recovered from their amazement.

The two six-pound swivel-guns on the Gorham's fort were taken to Falmouth during the Revolutionary War and never returned. With the aid of John Sprague, editor of "Sprague's Journal of Maine History," I am endeavoring to find some trace of them. Where the grist-mill stood on the Capisic the city of Portland now extends.

For the early Massachusetts settlers' views concerning their right to exterminate Indians see Chapter 6, George Edward Ellis' article, vol. 1. "Memorial History of Boston." Cotton Mather, in part, wrote of them, "These doleful creatures are the veriest ruins of mankind. One might see among them what a hard master the Devil is to the most devoted of his vassals."

WITH the exception of *Tugg*, *Jessraday*, *Burnham*, *Wilks* and his wife and the *Robson* girl, all characters named in the Fort Massachusetts scenes were there and were killed or captured. *Boyce* is drawn from a clever counterfeiter of that time, who caused enough trouble by his rascalties to win mention of himself in several letters from Shirley to neighboring governors.

In 1744 there were but 1,141 houses in New York. Shooting-matches were popular, and not only lots of land, but gold watches and mahogany chests of drawers were shot "off." For good measure a woman was shot while picking berries at Gravesend, Long Island, in 1734, and twenty years later Cornelius Vonk was mistaken for a bear and shot on the outskirts of the city. It was not safe to stroll through Mr. Bayard's woods in 1759 because of the many hunters. During George's War the four gates to the city were in Pearl Street, Chatham Square, Broadway and Greenwich Streets. The stockades extended from James and Cherry Streets, diagonally across to Duane and Pearl Streets, and continued west, north of Warren (Singleton's, "Social New York Under the Georges").

The fear of the French fleet called back Massachusetts' troops to Boston and thousands of ill-trained militia poured into the town. Among the books I found helpful, in addition to any mentioned above, are: vol. 3 Sylvester's "Indian Wars of New England;" vols. 9 and 10, "Docs. Relating to the Colonial History of N. Y."; Morgan's "The League of the Iroquois;" Sir William Johnson's Papers, 3 vols.; Correspondence of William Shirley, 2 vols.; Sylvester's "Maine Pioneer Settlements," 5 vols.; Severance's "An Old Frontier of France," vol 2.; Grant's "Memoirs of an American Lady," vol. 1; Earle's, "Old Time Gardens," "Stage Coaches and Tavern Days;" "Curious Punishments of Bygone Days;" "Child Life in Colonial Days;" "Home Life in Colonial Days;" Kalm's Travels, vol. 2; Harland's "Colonial Homesteads," 2 vols.; Parkman's "Half Century of Conflict," vol. 2.; "Narrative and Critical History of No. America," vol. 5; Sawyer's "Firearms In American History;" Beauchamp's "History of the New York Iroquois"; Drake's "Book of Indians"; Halsey's "Four Great Rivers".—PENDEXTER.

* * *

THE following inquiry, just drawn from our Camp-Fire cache, was written in August, 1923. The clipping referred to reported two cases in one night of a girl taken from her escort in an automobile by men armed with revolvers and raped.

By the time this reaches you there may be laws making it a crime or misdemeanor for any law-abiding American citizen to carry or even own a pistol or revolver for self-defense or for the protection of his wife, daughter, sister, mother or sweetheart, or imposing an often prohibitive tax on such weapons. But in case our famously free-born, independent, liberty-boasting American citizens are still allowed to protect themselves and their women against robbery, rape and murder, the suggestions made by Mr. Harriman in reply to Mr. Hodson's inquiry may make it quite a bit safer for a reputable citizen to dare use the public city streets and country roads for his own business or pleasure.

Youngstown, Ohio.

The enclosed clipping from today's paper shows what a man is liable to get up against any night after dark on the country roads around Youngstown. For every case that is reported and receives publicity, you can bet that there are many hushed up. I am U. S. R. A. Governor of the Revolver Club here and have made more than one possible at 60 feet with my .38 S. and W., but what the Sam Hill is a chap going to do if his car is suddenly held up and one or two of those birds get the drop on him? They would have to drill me before they got my wife, but even that sacrifice would probably not save her.

A while ago you wrote some interesting dope about a sleeve draw, but gave no details and I sure would like to know your method of thus toting a gun. I can see that if held in some way on the back of the arm, the gun would be in the handiest possible position for instant use as one's hands went "up." What kind of gun could best be carried, and how? I have a Colt .32 and a .38, both automatics, besides my S. and W.

Of course, the best way out is to keep off country roads after dark, but you never know when you may run into it, and then a gun under your leg or in a holster anywhere is no good.

Hope you won't mind my troubling you.—LEO C. HODSON.

Mr. Harriman's reply follows:

Los Angeles, California.

First thing you do, teach your wife to shoot and let her pack a gun. Get her so accustomed to the gun that she has no fear of it. Teach her to point it as she would her finger and how to score well. Then, when she rides with you, let her keep the gun down between her right leg and the outside of the car, ready to slip the safety and get busy shooting, while you get your own gun into action.

Get a spring clip made, fastened to a wrist-strap of leather. Let your other automatic rest on the back of your left arm, held by this clip in your sleeve. When you have to draw, shove your arm out as far as you can, to jerk the sleeve up, and grab the iron.

Keep your S. & W. in a pocket for reserve action. Get Your Man.

WE ARE having the same trouble here, mainly because our judges are too soft to administer the right sentences when a moron is tried and found guilty. Our law says life for a rape fiend, but not one out of a dozen in the last year has got that sentence.

The enclosed leaflet from the Ithaca Gun Company puts you wise to a dandy defense proposition. Their Auto and Burglar Gun in a peach. A man can buy an old double gun of any gauge, saw the barrels off, cut the stock into a pistol grip, have a sole-leather holster made and set the holster on the riser of the front seat, so the butt is where his right hand just naturally drops on it. A 12-gauge, say, with buckshot shells in it, would be a dandy argument against an assaulter of women. I have no auto now, but I hope to get another later. I shall carry a revolver in a spring holster under my left arm and a short shotgun in a holster on the front of the seat, when I do have a car.

I NOT only do not mind your troubling me, as you call it, but I am glad that you did and hope that my advice may result in a perfect defense. The anti-revolver birds would let such swine as these attackers of girls and women run armed, while you and I would be defenseless. Not while I live. I shall go armed in spite of the fools and I'll shoot, too. One chief of police here telephoned me once, requesting me to always pack a big gun of an evening when I went out. He had sense.

We must stand up for our rights and insist upon the right of defense above all else. Down in West Virginia they passed a fool law against gun-toting, requiring a $15,000 bond if a man wanted to pack a revolver. Result, the police and sheriff's deputies went unarmed, in the coal regions where the Black Hand and kindred gangs ran riot.

I am from Medina myself and we Buckeyes must stand together in opposition to the idiots who would disarm the decent people and let the toughs go armed. There is no false alarm business about this. A gang of Congressmen are bent upon depriving us all of the right to defend ourselves and our families. They stand in with the crooks. That is what it virtually amounts to.

A friend wrote me that one of his intimates runs a store in N. Y. C. and keeps open late Saturday nights. He carries home a bunch of kale each Saturday, near midnight. He applied for a permit to carry a gun. His petition was denied. Two nights later he was held up and robbed of $300—and the thief laughed at him over having a permit denied him! They knew who got a permit and who failed. The Sullivan Law directly aided the robber there, and oppressed the honest tradesman. Bah.

Yours sorta mad like—E. E. HARRIMAN.

THE right of self-defense, the right of free speech, the right of public assembly, in a word, all the rights traditionally treasured as inherent in free-born American citizens, are being gradually but inexorably taken away from us. The very existence of our democratic ideals and of our republican government founded upon those ideals is absolutely dependent upon our possession of these rights. Yet they are being taken away from us.

Who is taking them? Why? For what selfish or sinister purpose? The situation has become too acute for us to waste time over debating these points, vital as they are. The emergency has become such that, to save ourselves at all, we must center every thought and energy against the danger itself. After that we can find out who and why.

We turn to our fellow citizens and find vast numbers of them either indifferent or actually furthering this or that curtailment of democratic liberty and personal freedom, perhaps merely seeking a good end through unwise and dangerous means, or deliberately working for some end at direct variance with the continuance of American ideals and government. Whether that un-American end be furthering, at our country's expense, the purposes of a political party, a minority greedy for financial control, a religious sect, a class, the Soviet Government, a foreign power, we dare not now take time to inquire.

We turn to the Constitution and the lawyers and legislators tell us that its plainly written words do not mean what the bulk of the American people have, for nearly a century and a half, taken them to mean. As a bulwark for our liberties they tell us our Constitution is only an empty sound written upon paper but they demonstrate to us very practically that it can always be interpreted quite "legally" to justify or permit any lessening of our liberties whenever fanaticism, greed or desire for power chooses to push the button.

Then, by heaven, if our Constitution is such that it no longer guards us in essential democratic freedom, let us rebuild it so that it *will* guard us! For I say to you that we the people are the law, and the makers and interpreters of the law. What we have built lawfully we can rebuild lawfully. Or nullify and build anew.

We have venerated the Constitution as the basis of our national existence, the expression of our democratic ideals, the guaranty of our personal liberties. But you lawyers prove to us that it is not at all what we believed it to be.

When, for example, it states that "The right of the people to have and to bear arms shall not be infringed," you prove to us that this does not at all protect us from having this right infringed or even from having it taken away entirely. Your legal interpretation—which your small group has converted into practise and precedent—is that the Constitution's purpose was to define the line between State and Federal control rather than to guarantee the liberty of the citizens of both.

Very well, if it doesn't guarantee our liberties and rights, then we want something that does. *What this country needs—needs so badly that the whole spirit and body of democracy will perish unless we get it and get it soon—is a Bill of Rights.*

Many voters, taking a blind short-cut toward some single, isolated end in view or led by the nose or influenced through propaganda by this or that minority seeking its own selfish ends, have developed a mania for legislation. Here, then, is a chance to indulge that mania and to be doing something infinitely more important than you have ever done before. Here is a chance for you to turn, for once, from passing prohibitory or destructive laws and pass something really protective and constructive.

For the remainder of us, who attach less importance to the passing of any specific law than to the essential foundation of all laws, here, too, is our chance.

And our last chance.

* * *

PROBABLY some of you know that Harvard University is the recognized center of the study of American folk-song, but how many of you know that our own *Adventure* is already being recognized as one of the best collectors of these folk-songs and that its readers, under the inspiration and leadership of R. W. Gordon, have amazed some of the leading folk-lore authorities of the country by the value and number of the old folk-songs collected? That, I think, is a very conservative statement of the case.

As Mr. Gordon himself (he'd much rather be called Bob) once expressed it to me in personal conversation, when the mass of manuscript collected by the department is printed, it will be impossible for any scientific and at all comprehensive work on American folk-song to appear without being marked thickly with credits to *Adventure.*

My only contribution to the achievement is faith. I knew *Adventure* readers could do yeoman work along these lines, though what they have done has surpassed my fondest dreams. I believed in your ability for this particular undertaking, not because of your number, but because of your character as a whole, because of the various and diverse types represented among you and because of the marked prominence of a particular type—the kind of man who, while he may dress for dinner or not dress for anything, has a keen knowledge of real and permanent values and enough public spirit to make personal effort to preserve such values.

Also because of two other factors. *Adventure's* readers are more thoroughly scattered over all parts of the United States and Canada than are the readers of almost any other magazine and, judging from obtainable data, the "life" of a copy of our magazine is longer than that of any other bar none. More than any other it seems to be passed from hand to hand until worn out. Answers in considerable number come in to questions asked two or three years ago or are sent to addresses that have not been current for years.

And Gordon, Bob Gordon, has taken fullest advantage of the opportunity, bringing to the work a thorough knowledge of the folk-lore field, unflagging energy and unbounded enthusiasm. It is his personality alone that has shaped all of us and our magazine into what may well prove to be the best collecting agency for American folk-songs that has yet come into existence. His is the credit and we are glad to go on working under his leadership, building up an enduring monument to ourselves, to the magazine and to him.

Now, as you know, he is on a collecting expedition through much of the United States and Canada, thanks to your support past and present, to a fellowship granted to him by Harvard expressly for the purpose of this trip and to support from our magazine itself. A one-man expedition in a flivver and yet the Harvard *Adventure* Expedition is the most thoroughly equipped and most extensive undertaking yet planned for the collection and preservation of our American folk-song.

He will be in the field, all told, about one year, covering the mountain districts of North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia, Charleston and the Port Royal Islands; down the coast to Savannah and in to Jacksonville, Florida; the mountain district of Georgia, the interiors of Alabama and Mississippi; then the cotton ports as far west as Galveston. In the spring he heads north along the Mississippi, going through Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota. Then east through Canada into New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, with Newfoundland as final field of investigation.

Let me quote from his own words to you in a recent issue:

> THE success of the entire trip must depend in large part upon your cooperation. Obviously the time that I shall have to spend in any one district will be brief, too brief to enable me to hunt out singers. That I'm trusting you to do for me. You can direct me to districts where you know old songs are still to be found, can give me the names of friends and acquaintances who might be able to serve as local guides, and can send me brief notes of introduction to singers.
>
> FOR my part, I shall make every attempt to insure the accurate recording and the permanent preservation of the materials collected. The tunes as well as the words will be taken down by means of phonographic recordings, and these records will be specially treated in order to make them more permanent.
>
> Thus it will be possible for future generations to hear the living voices of singers of our day. There is no reason, as Mr. Edison himself assures me, why these records should not still be in perfect condition hundreds of years from now.
>
> The idea of phonographic recordings is not new, but they have never been used—except for the songs of the American Indians—to any great extent in this country. Moreover such records as have up to this time been made by collectors have not been treated so as to preserve them for long periods of time. If then, through your cooperation, it is possible to make several thousand such recordings in the course of the next few years, something very real will have been done for the preservation of our national song.
>
> Obviously I shall be unable to carry with me my reference library or any of the numerous copies of songs that have come in to the department during the last three years. As a result I shall not be able, often, to answer inquiries from you as fully as I should like to, or to send transcripts of songs requested.
>
> Please, however, don't stop sending in contributions of songs. They will be forwarded promptly if you address them in the care of *Adventure* and I'll try to acknowledge them, perhaps by postcards with photographs taken on the trip. Remember that whatever is of value and interest in this department is due almost entirely to your cooperation in sending in texts; my part is merely to see that as much as possible of what you send gets eventually to the printer.

I know that you will do all in your power to make the Harvard *Adventure* Expedition a splendid success in all respects. Those of you who have not yet met Gordon—Bob Gordon—personally will have to take from those of us who have that that in itself is a pleasure.

Pretty soon we'll have to take for our watch-word "Camp-Fire Does Things Worth While."

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in next issue.*)

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: Aug. 30 to Sept. 20, Oct. 10 to Dec. 30—1923. Jan. 10 and 20, Feb. 20 and 30, March 10, 20, 30, May 20, Sept. 30, Oct. 30, Nov. 10, Dec. 20 and 30—1924.—Address BOLLING ARTHUR JOHNSON, Lumber World Review, 17th Floor, Transportation Building, 608 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

WILL SELL: June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct.—1915. All except first Jan., mid-March, mid-May, mid-Sept—1921. March 18, Aug. 3, Dec. 18—1920. All except April 30 1922. All except May 20—1923. All except Sept. 30—1924. All through Aug. 10—1925. What offer for all or any?—Address THOS. M. WATTS, 1535 Main St., Columbia, N. C.

WILL SELL: 7 issues 1916; 4—1917; 14—1919; 20—1920; 22—1921; 18—1923; 19—1924; 13—1925. $5.00 for the lot, purchaser to pay transportation.—Address, P. H. MITCHELL, 491 Grand St., Bridgeport, Conn.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to LAURENCE JORDAN.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general-rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, Coupeville, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. Islands Part 3 Cuba
WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.

7. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

8. ★ South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., Boite No. 167, Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, South Pacific Ocean. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

9. ★ Australia and Tasmania
PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Road, Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

11. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.)*

12. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4., Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

13. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

14. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

15. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.* Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

17. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.* Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

18. ★ Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting. *(Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*

19. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure.* Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

20. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, La Roseraie, Cap d'Ail (Alpes Maritimes), France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. *(Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*

21. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Gulfport and Coast Enquiry Depot, Turnbull Bldg., Gulfport, Miss. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

22. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

23. Africa Part 5 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.* Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

24. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.* Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

25. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.)

26. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

27. Turkey
J. F. EDWARDS, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

28. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.)

29. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.)

30. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
LIEUT. WILLIAM JENNA, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

32. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

33. Finland, Lapland and Russia
ALEKO E. LILIUS, care *Adventure.* History, customs, travel, shooting, fishing, big game, camping, climate, sports, export and import, industries, geography, general information. In the case of Russia, political topics, outside of historical facts will not be discussed.

34. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
CAPT. FRED. F. FLEISCHER, care *Adventure.* History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, out-door life.

35. ✠ Great Britain
THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

36. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.* Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

37. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 21 Claremont Ave., New York, N.Y. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

38. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.* Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

39. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

40. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

41. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Box 304, San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

42. Mexico Part 3 Southeastern
W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md., Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche. Inhabitants, history and customs; archeology, topography, travel and explorations; business conditions, exploitation of lumber, hemp, chewing gum and oil.

43. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

44. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

45. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
A. D. L. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing; farm locations, wild lands, national parks. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

46. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

47. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
(Editor to be appointed.)

48. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

49. ✠ Canada Part 7 Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. *(Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

50. ★ Canada Part 8 Newfoundland
C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland. Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information. *(Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.)*
✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.)*

51. Canada Part 9 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island
Fred L. Bowden, 54 Mason Avenue, Binghamton, New York. Lumbering, hunting, fishing and trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading; general information.

52. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 5647 Lexington Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

53. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

54. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

55. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

56. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
(Editor to be appointed.)

57. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
Fred W. Egleston, Bozeman, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

58. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

59. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

60. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure.* Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially early history of Missouri Valley.

61. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

62. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

63. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See section 64.*)

64. Middle Western U. S. Part 5 Great Lakes
H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

65. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich.
Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.

66. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure.* Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure.* Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

68. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.* Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

69. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, care of *Adventure.* Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

70. Eastern U. S. Part 6. Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot river. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine
H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

72. Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., and Mass.
Howard R. Voight, 108 Hobart St., New Haven, Conn. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.

73. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey
(Editor to be appointed.)

74. Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland
Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, care of *Adventure.*

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.*

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the Forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.* Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests;

Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Capt. Fred F. Fleischer, care *Adventure*. United States: Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

Lieut. Francis Greene, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning Naval and maritime affairs.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. City. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

P.—Entomology

Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write Laurence Jordan, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **State Police** of any State, Francis H. Bent, Jr., care of *Adventure*.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

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Peru

A PLENTY of game up the rivers.

Request:—"Enclosed find self-addressed stamped envelope. I would appreciate information on the following:

1. What is the climate of Peru?
2. What is the nature of the country in regard to its topography?
3. Do you know anything about the Iquitos? If so, what is it like? I have been told that there is gold in that region, and have maps giving the location of it. Do you know if there is any truth to this?
4. Can you get into Peru or any of the South American countries with firearms? For instance, could I take a rifle and revolver with me?
5. What is the cheapest and best way to go there from Chicago?
6. Could one get a job here and there? I am contemplating the trip purely from the standpoint of adventure and travel.
7. Is there plenty of game in the interior? What are the natives like in the Peruvian territory?
8. What languages are spoken there?
9. What diseases are prevalent, and what are their remedies?

If there is any other information you can give me that would be useful, I certainly would be grateful for it."—C. K. Berray, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Young:—1. The climate of Peru varies according to elevation above sea level and distance north and south of the equator and also on each side of the Andes considerably, so that almost every sort of climate and temperature can be found somewhere in Peru. To be brief here is what it amounts to: Desert on the Pacific coast, dry and almost barren up the western slopes and into the high plateau country where the Inca civilization used to exist, ascending to snow-clad mountain tops, sloping to a temperate zone and thence to a humid, heavy tropical belt in the Amazon basin.

2. As above.

3. Iquitos is a city which can be reached by ships sailing direct from New York and Europe two thousand miles up the Amazon River and is the head of navigation for large vessels although smaller steamers and tugs can still ascend the river nine hundred miles farther up. There is gold to be

found on the various tributaries of the Amazon in all directions above Iquitos, possibly seven hundred miles up in a westerly, southwesterly and northwesterly direction.

4. Yes, but confine yourself to calibers ranging up to .38 as they will not, as a rule, allow you to enter arms over that bore.

5. Direct by steamer from New York. Of course you can go to Callao and up to Cerro de Pasco by rail and then by mule to one of the tributaries and then down by canoe and launch, but this is a real adventurous trip and takes a lot of time and some little nerve.

6. You might hire out there to some rubber company for work up one of the rivers or in a rubber camp. It would depend on luck if you struck a job you would care for.

7. There is plenty of game a few hundred miles up the rivers. The natives of Peru range from pure white Spaniards through the half-breed cholos of the Pacific coast, through various crosses of Inca and Quichua with Spanish to the wild Indians of the eastern slopes of which there are some fifty different kinds and various degrees of savagery.

8. Spanish, Quichua, various Indian languages.

9. Malaria, beri-beri, dysentery are the worst.

Write Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C. for booklet "Peru." Also see sketch in Encyclopedia Britannica. Best wishes.

The full statement of the departments, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Maryland

FOLLOWING Braddock's trail.

Request:—"As you are the 'Ask Adventure' expert for Maryland, I would be very grateful if you would give me a little information.

1. On the historical places of interest in your section of Maryland.

2. What is the largest coal company in your section of the State, and give me, if possible, an estimate of the average number of tons shipped weekly from this company's mine, or mines.

I am enclosing a self-addressed envelope for your reply."—James Finzell, Washington, D. C.

Reply, by Mr. Allen:—Some of the most important historical places in my section of this State are as follows:

The old Clarysville Hospital, famous during the Civil War, situated on the National Pike and yearly is the mecca of many tourists. The hospital itself, is abounding with historical incident; famous generals of the Union Army during the Civil War have stayed there: it was a "stop" for the stage-coach era: today, you will find this old hospital converted into a historical inn, and any one stopping there for a night will have all historical incidents connected with the building fully explained.

Then, farther up the National Road you will find Frostburg, my home town. It was founded in 1812 by Meshcach Frost, and on the Catholic church grounds you will find a monument to our founder. If you step over my way, you will find my home on Braddock's road, and a short distance directly below you will find Braddock's Camp Site, while marching from Fort Cumberland to Pittsburgh. A stone is erected there which gives Braddock's Staff of Officers in full, and the respective date his army made camp. Not far from this stone, you will find an old historical building built in 1804 and the names of the builders inscribed thereon. If you follow Braddock's road through the mountains, you will eventually come to the spot where he is reported to be buried. You will also glimpse some wonderful scenery from the high St. John's Rock. The farther up the National Road you progress, the more numerous will historical landmarks become.

2. The largest coal company in this section of Maryland is the Consolidated Coal Company. At the present, it is rather difficult to estimate the amount of coal shipped, as this company has several mines in this region. From their mine number 9, however, they ship between 520 and 540 tons of coal per day; if the shipping is steady, from this one mine alone that would be a total of 3,120 tons per week.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

West Indies

THEY won't be able to get it.

Request:—"I am writing to ask you for whatever information you may be kind enough to give in regard to a cruise to Cuba and the West Indies that five young men and myself are considering making some time in search of copra and coconut oil.

We have a tentative plan of purchasing a 120-ft. schooner with auxiliary motor at New Orleans. We believe that the mobility of the schooner will enable us to cruise about and collect coconuts in the smaller, more remote islands untapped by the big traders. We have a plan of pressing the copra on board the vessel, and storing it below in tanks for shipment back to New Orleans. Does it seem feasible to you? The auxiliary would supply power for operating the press.

We wonder whether native labor could be obtained for a negligible sum for gathering the nuts and opening them. We are not sure what would be the best locality to operate in. After cruising about and filling our tanks with coconut oil, we would cruise back to New Orleans and sell it, at an estimated $16,000 for a 200-ton cargo.

I would like to ask you whether gasoline is available in this area, whether pressing the copra for ourselves instead of at an established plant would be profitable, whether this is the best time to make the venture, and what the possibilities are of a market for the oil. Also, where is the best place to pick up a schooner and equipment at a fair price.

None of us speak Spanish, though there are several experienced navigators among us. I have collected enough data to know that it looks feasible as an expedition, but I would much appreciate the seasoned advice of a man like yourself who is thoroughly familiar with local conditions. The idea is *not* to make a quick and easy fortune, but to be certain that the voyage at least pays for itself. Sort of an adventure, as it were, for six or eight months, but one that we would continue if it showed possibilities of profits. Do you believe it has these possibilities in our case?

I would appreciate very greatly any comments and suggestions you may care to make, and any further sources of information you might suggest in this country."—JOHN S. GILBERT, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Montgomery:—Your letter reached me this morning, and strange to say, just as I was having a "Horchata de Coco" which is a very refreshing drink.

You will not find any copra in Cuba at all, Mr. Gilbert, that is as a business. We grow some wonderful coconuts here but they are used chiefly as refreshments.

In some of the other islands of the West Indies there are coconuts grown in some quantities, take for instance in the Lesser Antilles amongst the Leeward and Windward Islands, also Porto Rico, but even there it would not be a paying proposition.

My understanding is that most of the copra comes from the Pacific Islands, although as we said above some business is done in the West Indies, though on a very small scale.

Native labor on the Island of Cuba receives a very fair wage on the sugar and tobacco plantations, averaging daily we would say from $1.80 to $2.50, and even higher doing piece work.

Gasoline is available throughout Cuba and at all ports, but at a price ranging from $0.40 to $0.52 per gallon.

On a cruise such as you suggest some one of you should speak Spanish although you will find English spoken throughout the West Indies by many persons; a knowledge of Spanish would be necessary in the entering and leaving of ports due to ship's papers, etc.

I suggest you write to Mr. Charles Brown, Jr. of the "A. A. Staff" at Boite No. 167 Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, South Pacific Ocean.

No doubt you will be disappointed at finding that you can not obtain copra in Cuba, and my advice is that you give up the idea as far as the West Indies are concerned as you can not possibly pay expenses.

Mr. Brown may be able to help you out in his district.

Cuba is in such close touch with the States, in fact all the West Indies are, that there are very few places that have no regular sailing of steamers which easily handle any small freight so that a cruise even with the idea of freighting would not be feasible.

If there is any further information that I can give you do not fail to call for same.

Telegraphing

TO THE north of us and to the south of us.

Request:—"Would like to know how the telegraph field is in Mexico and Canada.

In Mexico. Are the commercial or railroad operators mostly natives? What chance has an American operator in getting a position in the commercial or railroad field?

What large companies are there both Commercial and railroad?

Where shall I write in case I wish to send in my application?

The same questions concerning Canada.

Will appreciate any information you can give."—MICHAEL S. GAYO, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Newman:—To secure a position in the telegraph field in Old Mexico, you would have to speak and write the Spanish language, and if you are familiar with this you can land a job with some of the railroad companies, and wish to advise with the exception of a few small mining roads, the railroads are under the Mexican Government and was supposed to be returned to private ownership last July, but it was only a rumor.

So if you can qualify in Mexico, I would advise you to look at a copy of the Official Railroad Guide, and write to the Div. Supt. of those roads.

The same applies in securing a job with a railroad in Canada and I advise you to write to the Div. Supts. of such roads as Grand Trunk Pacific, Canadian National, and Canadian Pacific Rys. as these are large systems, and you can stand a better chance, and right at this time too, as there are many telegraph operators that migrate like the birds and have gone south for the winter.

The Canadian National Telegraph Co. operates 102,000 miles of wire in Canada, reaching 75,000 points, and you can write this company's offices at such cities as Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver, Victoria, B. C., Port Arthur, Ont., Saskatoon, Sask., and Montreal, addressing your letter to Supt. of Telegraph.

I know of no lines in Mexico, with the exception of the Western Union Tel. Co., that operates on the Southern Pacific Lines of Mexico down the west coast.

Japan

FIVE hundred A B C'S.

Inquiry:—"I will thank you for any information you can give me about Japanese newspapers. I wish to know if there is such a thing as a Japanese newspaper printed entirely in 'Romaji,' or our form of type. I suppose it is useless to expect such a thing. As you know, the Japanese language is printed with the Chinese hieroglyphics which are almost impossible for a foreigner to memorize. In addition to this, they have two elementary alphabets known as the "kana" and the "i-ro-ha." I think I have read that they have papers in these elementary alphabets for the benefit of those who have not had the opportunity to learn the more complicated system of writing. If you know of any such papers as I have mentioned will you please give me the addresses? Or, if you have a paper you don't want will you please send it?"—JAS. LAWLESS, Norristown, Penna.

Reply, by Mrs. Knudson:—The only Japanese periodical of which I know—there may be others—published in Romaji, or Roman type, is the organ of the "Society for the Propagation of Roman Alphabets," No. 3 1-chome, Yurakucho, Kojimachi, Tokyo, Japan. Write them, in English if you wish.

There are dictionaries and some few books published in Romaji. You can doubtless procure a list of such books by writing either Daikokuya, Booksellers, Kyoto, Japan, or Maruzen Kabushiki Kaisha, Booksellers, Tori-Sanchone, Nihombashi, Tokyo, Japan. The Japan Hotel Association, care of Traffic Department, Imperial Government Railways, Tokyo, Japan, issues a "Tourist's Hand Book," free I think, with quite a Romaji vocabulary.

Before discussing the Japanese newspapers let me say: The ideographs of China, which form the basis of the Japanese written language, are in general "word" characters, while the *kata-kana* of Japan is formed from "syllable" characters originally borrowed from the "halves" of Chinese names, or ideograms.

Forty-seven syllabic characters were thus originally—in the 9th century—borrowed from China. These—with a 48th character later added—form the Japanese alphabet, or I-ro-ha—just as we say "A B C's"—and the written language which uses this syllabic alphabet is the *kata-kana*, shortened to *kana*.

Children under ordinary circumstances of education are said to learn about five hundred Chinese ideographs; in later life some add to these, but many do not. For this reason many newspapers and books intended for popular reading are printed in Chinese characters with the Japanese *kana* characters by their side. It seems complicated to us, but the Japanese somehow grasp it. It's something like writing a thing in French, as a learned language, and then putting the English side by side with it to accommodate those of us who do not know French; only we aren't "brought up" on French and the Japanese are brought up on some of the Chinese written language as well as on their own *kana*.

The daily newspaper is about fifty years old in Japan now. A few claim a circulation of one quarter of a million. They are conducted much as they are in this country, advertisements, party prejudices, news agencies, press associations, and all. But they are printed in Chinese and *kana* or in *kana* or in English.

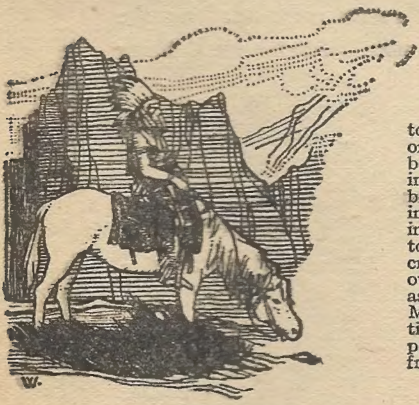
I am enclosing a strip from a Japanese daily—I have no entire papers.

The *Far East*, *Herald of Asia*, *Japan Magazine*, are in English, all published in Tokyo and may be easily reached by addressing their respective offices, Tokyo, Japan. There are also some six or seven dailies published in English by foreigners—mostly Britishers. Perhaps the best known is *Japan Advertiser*, Yamashitacho, Kyobashi-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address JOSEPH COX, *Adventure*, New York.

LOST TRAILS



NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

TALBOT, GEO. F. Your friend is anxious to get in touch with you at once.—Address "MERCEDES" care of CHRIS CHRISTIANSEN, 638 Kearney St., San Francisco, Calif.

KUEHNLE, WILLIAM ENSIGN. (or Kuhnle) U. S. N. R. F., served on board U. S. S. *Newport* during 1918 and 1919, in the 3rd Naval District. Please write to LIEUT. THOMAS L. SULLIVAN, 190 Highland St., Roxbury, Mass.

BLANKSBY, ROBERT. Is an ex-Air Pilot, British Army, six feet tall, dark complexion. Last seen in Walkerville, Ont., Jan., 1925; reported seen at Larder Lake, Ontario, June, 1925. Any information will be appreciated. —Address ERNEST AINSWORTH, 32 Lincoln Road, Walkerville, Ontario, Canada.

HUEY, PETE. Missing these last seventeen years. Height about 5 feet, dark hair and complexion. Last heard of at Erie, Pa. Any information will be appreciated by his sister Kate.—Address MRS. W. T. NEILSEN, 9419 Carton Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

CLARK, JOSEPH KIRBY. Age about 20 years. Last heard of in Chicago or Detroit. Any information will be appreciated by his uncle.—Address GEORGE CLARK, 422 Floyd St., Toledo, Ohio.

BREEDEN, E. O. I have plenty of work now and could use you if you were here. M. was here but went back to her home. I am worrying about you Sonboy, so come home and I will help you. Write to me care of *Adventure*. Dad.

POLLARD, HARRY and Sever Nelson. Last seen in Yuma, Arizona in April, 1917. Were with me on trip down Colorado River in winter of 1913 and 1914. Would like to get in touch with them. Any information will be appreciated.—Address LESLIE E. STRINGER, 1027 Ordway St., Berkeley, Calif.

G. W. T. Dad, I am alone and need you. Mother is gone. Everything is safe here for you to return. Please write to me. Have been ill and need help.—Address VIEVA O'FARRELL, Hotel Northern, 533 Broadway, San Diego, Calif.

RAMSAY, MARCUS. 17 years of age; height 5 feet 10 inches; weight 155-160 lbs.; build stocky; gray eyes; decided English accent; chestnut brown hair, slightly wavy. When he left home on Friday, October 16, he was wearing a blue serge suit and soft brown hat. May be found operating a Harley-Davidson motorcycle Model 265 Series D-2069. Dealer plate bearing name of Harry Ison, 434 West 125th St., N. Y. C.—license plates C-4763, N. J. Cycle equipped with following extras—handle crossbars (2) K. B. spotlights; plain dial clock; sheepskin saddle cover; luggage carrier on rear—ammeter. Suitcase probably strapped on cycle. His mother is ill over his disappearance. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HAROLD C. KEYE, Lincoln International Detective Bureau, Inc., Aeolian Bldg., 33 W. 42nd St., N. Y. C.

CHRISTENSEN, WALTER. Age 23 years, six feet tall. Last heard of in Seattle, Washington. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address HOWARD CHRISTENSEN, 1917 Lombard, Everett, Wash.

EDMINTON, DANIEL J. Born in Johnstown, Pa. Enlisted in U. S. A. Feb. 20, 1905, second enlistment, assigned to Co. "A" 22nd Infantry. Discharged July 23, 1906 at Camp Tacoma Murray, Washington. Any information will be appreciated by his son.—Address A. J. EDMINTON, 76 Walnut St., Manchester, N. H.

THOMPSON, BERT. A printer by trade. Last heard from about 1905 in Fresno, Calif. Please write.—Address ROMIE SHEAR, 214 Mt. Ida St., Hot Springs, National Park, Ark.

THE following have been inquired for in either the January 20, or February 10, 1926, issues of ADVENTURE. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

BROWN, John W.; Burquette, Frenchie; Davis, William A.; Ellis, Leonard N.; Furaro, Danton; Haynes, Giena Robertson; Hrinco, Joe S.; Hydrick, Edith Adelaide; Jones, William; Killie, Frank; McMillan, James; Maloney, Francis R. and Francis D. Browning; Martney, Ralph; Robinson, James R.; Sargent, Norman; Schudolska, Esther; Scully, James Stuart and Howard Kieth Weeks; Sellen, Robert; Sharpe, Cecil; Smith, Grover C.; Windross, Raymond H.; Winsor, W. F.

MISCELLANEOUS: Pop; Will any man that I served with in Haiti in 1917 to 1920 or in the Rifle Range Detachment at Quantico, Va., 1921 to 1923, please write.

CHRISTIE, WILLIAM. Last heard of in Cheltenham, Pa., in 1922. Any information will be appreciated.—Address SAMUEL WADE, U. S. S. *Penobscot*, Navy Yard, N. Y.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MARCH 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

POP — ***T. T. Flynn***
Twenty-eight minutes to make up.

LOG CABIN MEN A Five-Part Story Part II — ***Hugh Pendexter***
Indians flooded the forest.

BETWEEN GENTLEMEN — ***Charles Victor Fischer***
The skipper staked "*Static.*"

THE TAMING OF BILL McHARG — ***John Joseph***
A loud mouth and a yellow streak.

SANDS OF SOLITUDE — ***William Westrup***
The bushman blundered.

THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON — ***Post Sargent***
History's greatest gentleman.

STILL FARTHER AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by T. S. Stribling, H. Bedford-Jones, Leonard H. Nason, Leo Walmsley, John Dorman and W. Ryerson Johnson; W. C. Tuttle, L. Patrick Greene and Fairfax Downey; short stories by Howard E. Morgan, Nevil Henshaw, Alan LeMay, Percy Charles Chandler, Rolf Bennett, Fiswoode Tarleton, Walter J. Coburn, Robert Carse, George Bruce Marquis, Romaine H. Lowdermilk, Captain Dingle, Ralph R. Perry, Raymond S. Spears, Kenneth Malcolm Murray and others; stories of Indians in the American Army on the Western Front, Cajans in the bayou country of Louisiana, horse wranglers and cowpunchers in the hills of Montana, life-guards on the coast of Cornwall, special agents of the British Secret Service in India, hard case skippers and bucko mates on the Western Ocean, aviators among the smugglers of the Great Lakes, pigmies and patrol riders of the Mounted Police in Africa, filibusters in Central America, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.

"The spring of 1924 is memorable to me for what I suffered through loss of sleep, nervousness—general run-down condition; for six continuous weeks I endured boil after boil on neck and back, and naturally I looked a 'wreck.' Kind people recommended Yeast, but it took a well-known physician to convince me. I can truly say that before I had finished one week's treatment of two yeast cakes a day, I felt a change in my system. Every boil disappeared, my skin cleared, my strength increased. I feel different and look it. Life seems to hold more 'pep.'"

MISS ROBERTA O'BRIEN, Montreal, Can.

They Hardly Know Themselves Today

They conquered constipation, corrected skin and stomach disorders, renewed youthful optimism . . . . *with the aid of One Food*

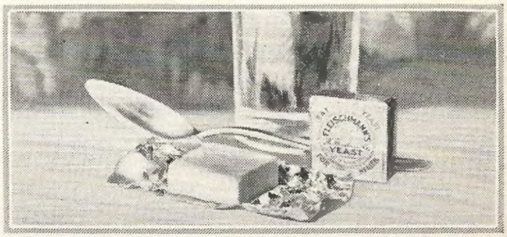
NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

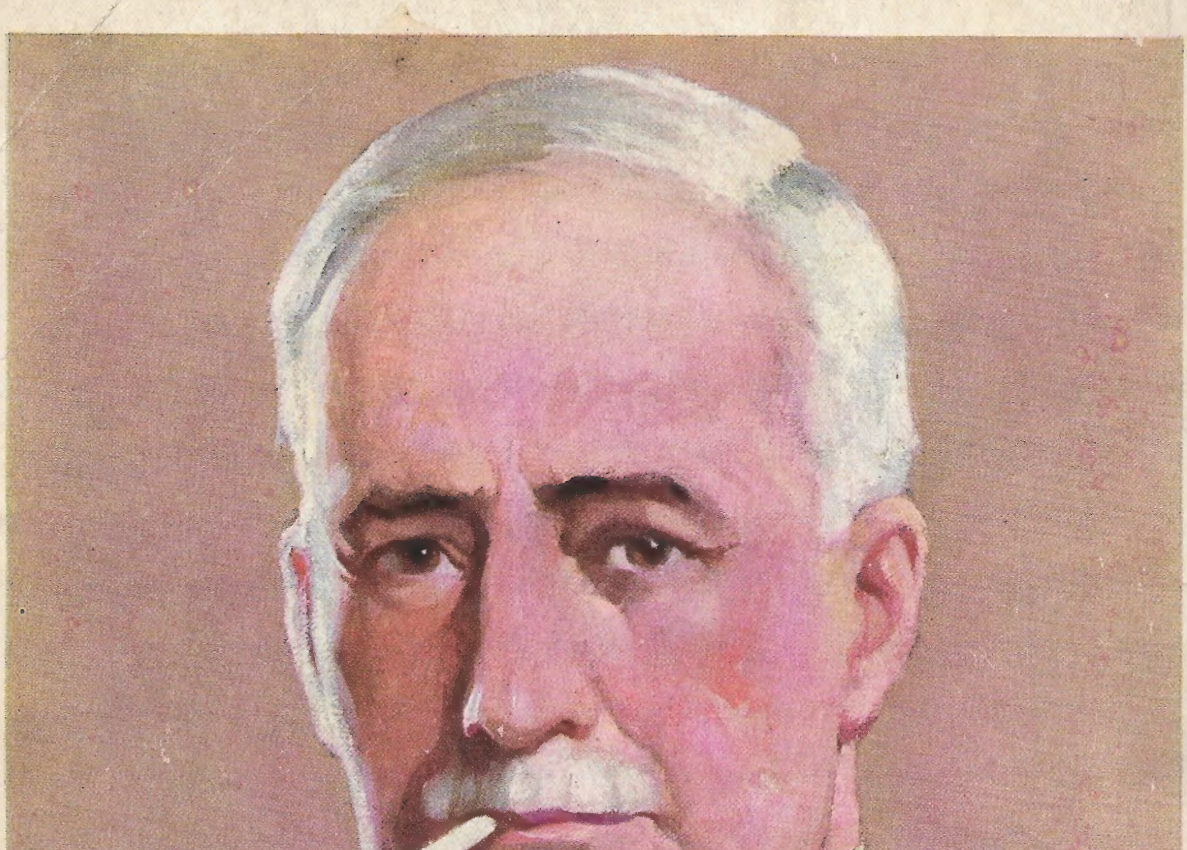
Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

Let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-25, The Fleischmann Co., 701 Washington St., New York.

"I was afflicted with chronic constipation for years. My attention was drawn to a lecture given by a doctor who spoke on Constipation and advised as a cure Fleischmann's Yeast, together with other proper foods. On my way home, I went into a grocery and asked for Yeast. After I had taken the Yeast for a period of three weeks, my condition improved remarkably. My outward appearance had a decided change for the better, and I still continue to take my Fleischmann's Yeast." ALEXANDRA GAIMS, New York City



This famous food tones up the entire system—aids digestion—clears the skin—banishes constipation.



Steadfast, unfailing quality has earned for Chesterfield the confidence of men everywhere

SUCH · POPULARITY · MUST · BE · DESERVED

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co

FEBRUARY 28th ISSUE, 1926
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ADVENTURE
25 Cents